PUBLIC CITIZEN NEWS
VOL. 45, NO. 3
MAY/JUNE 2025

Trump Froze Foreign Aid Without Congress. Public Citizen Sued to Stop It.

BY LIZA BARRIE

TAKING TRUMP TO COURT

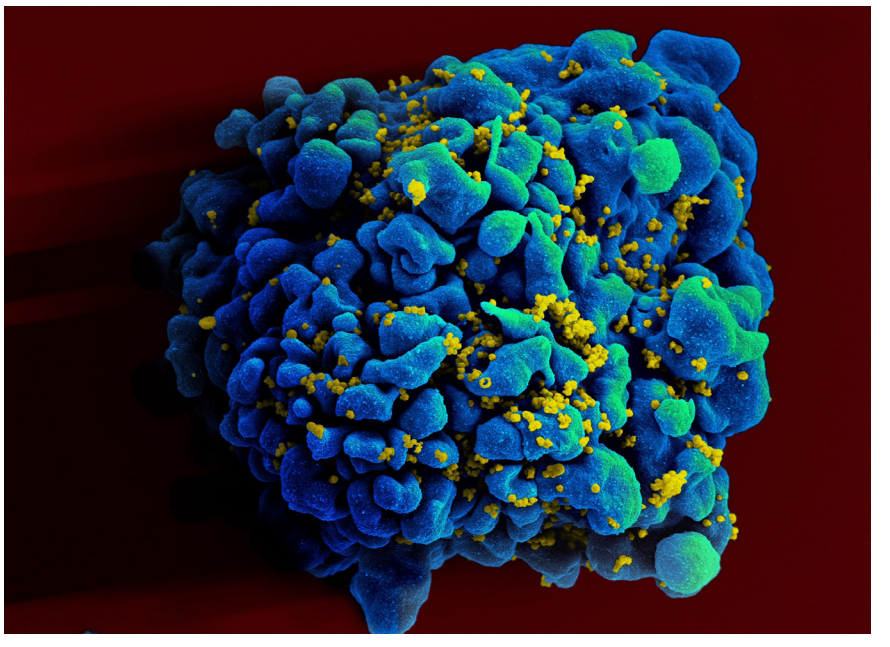
On his first day back in office, President Donald Trump unleashed an illegal assault on U.S. foreign assistance. He ordered a freeze of more than $11 billion in congressionally approved funding, including support for HIV treatment, polio eradication, global vaccination, maternal health, food aid, and investigative journalism. As a result, around the world, clinics closed, and clinical trials were abandoned midstream. Frontline health workers were fired. Journalists lost the protection that kept them safe.

The Trump administration claimed that the freeze was implemented to effectuate a policy review. In reality, it was an unlawful cancellation of foreign assistance that Congress had mandated. By halting aid that Congress had directed, the administration violated the Constitution and federal statutes.

Public Citizen went to court to try to reverse the damage.

The experiences of Public Citizen's three clients in its legal challenge illustrate the severe harm caused by halting foreign

see **Foreign**, page 4 ▶



Scanning electromicrograph of an HIV-infected H9 T cell courtesy of NIAID / Flickr.

Trump Guts Enforcement, Greenlights Corporate Crime Spree

BY DAVID ROSEN

In its first months in power, the Trump administration halted or moved to dismiss enforcement investigations and cases against more than 120 corporations, Public Citizen research has found.

"Trump's corporate pardons are a clear reminder that the president's true base is the billionaire executives and corporate elites who are eagerly lining up to indulge their greed at the trough of Trump's corruption," said Rick Claypool, a Public Citizen research director who tracks corporate enforcement. "Trump's soft-on-corporate-crime approach invites a corporate crime spree – with potentially catastrophic consequences for America's consumers, workers, and communities."

The list of dropped or halted cases includes:

- 46 of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) investigations and cases – that is, nearly every case about which public information is available;
- 43 investigations and cases brought by the Department of Justice (DOJ), where the Trump administration ordered freezes on whole categories of enforcement, including foreign corruption cases, civil rights cases, and environmental cases. This includes eight cases that have been fully dismissed and withdrawn;
- 21 Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigations and cases, including 13 cryptocurrency cases; and
- 7 dropped Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) cases, which had

see **Crime Spree**, page 4 ▶

Misuse of Special Government Employees Poses Glaring Corruption Risks

BY JON GOLINGER

During its first few destructive months in office, the second Trump administration has found a way around important ethics rules by quickly appointing people like Elon Musk – who have major potential conflicts of interest – to powerful government jobs. It has done so by misusing a little-known job classification called

see **SGE**, page 12 ▶

PUBLIC CITIZEN 50
People • Power • Progress YEARS

1600 20th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Williamsport, PA
Permit No. 4

INSIDE

FIGHTING FOR FAIR TRADE: EXPOSING CRONYISM AND DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY, PAGE 7

THE ART OF THE MEME DEAL, PAGE 11

IN THIS ISSUE

VOL. 45, NO. 3 • MAY/JUNE 2025

DEMOCRACY
1 Misuse of Special Government Employees Poses Glaring Corruption Risks

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT
6 After the Storm: Texas Lawmakers' Grid Gamble Falters
16 Climate Chaos Is Exploding Insurance Costs

GLOBALIZATION & TRADE
7 Fighting for Fair Trade: Exposing Cronyism and Demanding Accountability

GOVERNMENT & FINANCIAL REFORM
1 Trump Guts Enforcement, Greenlights Corporate Crime Spree
6 Largest Medicare Advantage Firms Spend Big to Privatize Care, Deliver an Inferior Product
11 The Art of the Meme Deal

HEALTH & SAFETY
5 How a Dubious Duchenne Gene Therapy Got FDA's Green Light

LITIGATION
1 Trump Froze Foreign Aid Without Congress. Public Citizen Sued to Stop It.

OTHER
2 Get to Know Public Citizen
8 Trump 100 days Roundtable
14 In the Spotlight
15 Public Citizen Recommends

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Abrams, M.P.H., Ph.D. *Health Research Group senior researcher*

Liza Barrie, *campaign director, Global Vaccines Access*

Rick Claypool, *research director*

Lisa Gilbert, *co-president*

Jon Golinger, *democracy advocate*

Craig Holman, *government affairs lobbyist*

Alana Matthew, *Global Trade Watch program associate*

José Medina, *Texas press officer*

Bartlett Naylor, *financial policy advocate*

David Rosen, *communications officer*

Mike Tanglis, *Congress Watch research director*

PUBLICCITIZEN

CONNECT ONLINE WITH US

@PUBLICCITIZEN.BSKY.SOCIAL

@PUBLIC_CITIZEN

FB.COM/PUBLICCITIZEN

GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN

ELYSE SCHUPAK

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers

Elyse Schupak is a policy advocate on Public Citizen's climate team, working at the intersection of climate change and financial regulation. Schupak's passion for economic justice and preserving a safe and livable planet is readily apparent when she talks about her career thus far.

Before joining Public Citizen last year, Schupak worked on the Hill for U.S. Rep. Mondaire Jones, covering economic, financial services, and climate policy. In 2020, in her home state of New York, Schupak led the field program for Jones' successful congressional campaign. Prior to pivoting to politics, she worked at BlackRock on a fixed income portfolio management team.

Schupak graduated from The London School of Economics with a master's degree in international political economy and holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Emory University. In her role at Public Citizen, she works to combat the influence of Wall Street and the fossil fuel industry in financial regulation and economic policy. Outside of work, she enjoys running, reading, and cooking elaborate meals for her friends and family.

What brought you to Public Citizen?

Schupak: I got to know several of my colleagues at Public Citizen when I worked on the Hill. We worked on a bill and several letters together and it was always a great collaborative experience. They were super smart and creative, so I knew I wanted to work with them if given the chance.

What experiences shaped your interest in Climate and Financial Regulation Policy?

Schupak: I worked at BlackRock during the period in which investors and asset managers were beginning to consider how to incorporate ESG (environmental, social and governance considerations) in their investment process, so I was aware that the financial industry was a relevant actor in the transition to a low-carbon economy – but I was skeptical that ESG investing, at least in the way it was being considered at that time, was going to be a meaningful part of decarbonization. Reading Bill McKibben's 2019 *New Yorker* piece "Money Is the Oxygen on Which the Fire of Global Warming Burns" totally changed my thinking on the financial industry's complicity in driving climate change and the role it could play in the green transition. At that time I was already looking to make a career pivot into something more public service-oriented, so reading that piece was a bit of an aha moment in terms of what possibilities could look like for me.

What motivates you?

Schupak: I am motivated by the prospect that we could become a country that meets everyone's basic economic needs because the U.S. has the resources to make that a reality. Unfortunately, climate change is a major force moving us, and the rest of the world, in the opposite direction – exacerbating inequality and creating more economic hardship. Mostly, I want people to live good lives and central to that is mitigating the drivers and impacts of climate change that threaten people's lives, livelihoods, and communities.

What is the most gratifying aspect of your job?

Schupak: Seeing the work we do taken up by those with political power has been the most gratifying part. It's easy to feel that change is impossible or that the political system is totally impenetrable, but there have been many moments in my time so far at Public Citizen that remind me this is not the case. When regulators engage with our work or it's reflected in a Congressional hearing or letter, it is a great reminder that we do have agency and the potential to make change.

– Compiled by Emma Wyler ■

1600 20TH ST. NW, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009 • (202) 588-1000 • MEMBER@CITIZEN.ORG • WWW.CITIZEN.ORG

Public Citizen is a national nonprofit membership organization based in Washington, D.C. Since its founding by Ralph Nader in 1971, Public Citizen has fought for corporate and government accountability to guarantee the individual's right to safe products, a healthy environment and workplace, fair trade, and clean and safe energy sources. Public Citizen is active in Congress, the courts and government agencies.

Public Citizen does not accept government or corporate grants. Our funding comes from our supporters throughout the country, who believe there should be full-time advocates of democratic principles working on their behalf; from foundations; and from the sale of our publications. Public Citizen is an equal opportunity employer. To become a member of Public Citizen and receive the award-winning *Public Citizen News,* please call (202) 588-1000 or send a check payable to Public Citizen for $20 to Public Citizen Membership Services at the address above.

Public Citizen News (ISSN 0738-5927), entire contents copyrighted 2025. *Public Citizen News* is printed on 10% recycled paper. Postmaster: Send address changes to Public Citizen News at the address above.

CO-PRESIDENTS
Lisa Gilbert and Robert Weissman

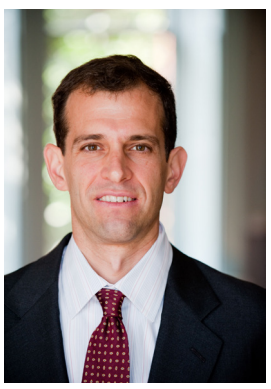
PUBLIC CITIZEN INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Jason Adkins (chair), Joan Claybrook, Brandi Collins-Dexter, Anna Galland, Joseline Garcia, Lisa Gilbert (ex officio), Danny Goldberg, Jim Hightower, Joy Howell, John Richard, Anthony So, Robert Weissman (ex officio)

PUBLIC CITIZEN FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Mark Chavez (chair), Maya Berry, Jim Bildner, Emily Chatterjee, Robert C. Fellmeth, Lisa Gilbert (ex officio), David Halperin, Annie Leonard, Cynthia Renfro, Steve Skrovan, Gerson H. Smoger, Robert Weissman (ex officio)

DIRECTORS
David Arkush, Climate; Omar Baddar, Communications; Elizabeth Beavers, Congress Watch; Noyan Eyigor, CFO; Amanda Fleming, Development; Peter Maybarduk, Access to Medicines; Adrian Shelley, Texas; Tyson Slocum, Energy; Robert Steinbrook, Health Research Group; Melinda St. Louis, Global Trade Watch; Allison Zieve, Litigation

EDITORIAL

100 Days of Trump



CO-PRESIDENTS' VIEW
LISA GILBERT AND ROBERT WEISSMAN

We've made it past the 100th day of Donald Trump's second presidency. And it's been a stunningly damaging period for the American people. We've seen unprecedented attacks on our democracy, our economy, the judiciary, our health care, the planet,our standing in the global ecosystem, our collective national psyche, and basic human decency.

But at Public Citizen we are fighting back. Fighting back in the courts, in the streets, with hard-hitting research, with messaging to the media, with strong coalitions, and with a focused vision of what we want this country to be on the other side of this national nightmare.

As of this writing, Public Citizen has filed 13 lawsuits against the regime since Trump returned to power. Within minutes of Trump taking office, Public Citizen and a partner group filed a lawsuit against his administration to push his so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires balance and transparency in federal committees. Since then, we've filed suits to protect Americans' privacy by stopping Trump's agencies from illegally sharing Americans' information with DOGE. We've also filed suits to reverse the unlawful deletion of critical health information from government websites. We filed suits to fight the Trump regime's unlawful dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). We filed a lawsuit to fight the illegal funding freeze of foreign assistance funding. We filed suit against the IRS on behalf of immigrant rights organizations to prevent the unlawful sharing of tax data with immigration authorities. We filed suit challenging the illegal dismantling of the Institute of Education Sciences within the Department of Education, and much more. And we are just getting started. We are constantly working to think of creative cases as the lawlessness of this administration continues.

And of course, we also continue to use other tools beyond the courtroom – advocating on Capitol Hill and in the media, and doing extensive research. For example, Public Citizen is leading the fight against the Trump regime's corrupt deregulatory hysteria. On Day One, Trump rescinded President Biden's executive action "Modernizing Regulatory Review," which reformed the rulemaking process to work in the interest of the American people rather than corporate profits. Trump also issued an absurd order demanding the elimination of 10 regulations for every new one. More recently, Trump issued an order that directs agencies to repeal rules that are purportedly out of compliance with various Supreme Court decisions – without using the required notice-and-comment rulemaking process required by law. Public Citizen analyzed and criticized these moves, and we are mobilizing the major pushback against the coming torrent of deregulatory actions we expect.

And the Trump regime isn't just rolling back regulations. In many cases it has stopped enforcing the law against corporate wrongdoers altogether. They have already halted or moved to dismiss enforcement investigations and cases against more than 100 corporations, with more cases against accused corporate criminals being abandoned every week. Public Citizen is documenting the massive drop-off in enforcement, exposing it to national media, and connecting the dots to make clear which corporations, CEOs, and industries have benefited.

Trump has also come up with a new way to assault the regulatory system. For the first time in almost a century, the president has fired commissioners at multiple independent agencies, denying them quorums and the ability to perform core agency functions. This breathtaking power grab is a slap in the face to Congress, which deliberately designed these agencies to be independent of the president. We are tracking these firings and the quorum status at independent agencies. The coalition we co-chair, the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards, originated a public letter from numerous organizations condemning Trump's attacks on these agencies. We also called out Trump's unlawful firing of the two Democratic commissioners at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), noting that the only purpose of such a move is to further neuter the FTC, leaving giant corporations free to cheat and scam, imperil our privacy, and grow their monopoly power.

Public Citizen is also diving deep into tracking corruption and created a public tracker for the massive number of corporate conflicts of interest among Trump's appointees. One of the most disgusting examples is of course Trump himself, and his ongoing schemes to profit off the presidency. His newest and most blatant grift is his push for people to purchase his meme "coin." Public Citizen has called for an investigation into whether Trump violated federal law barring the president from soliciting gifts. And we have highlighted the egregious risk inherent in the fact that since the meme can be purchased anonymously, unknown actors – including potentially foreign governments – could, in essence, stuff cash into the president's pockets.

We're also publishing research on many other hot button topics. For example, with Trump waging war on working people in America and across the world through the misuse of tariffs, we issued a report on the cronyism rife in Trump's tariff strategy. And we released a primer to the national media explaining how the Trump tariffs are a shakedown on behalf of Big Tech.

We've also been sounding the alarm on Trump's withdrawal from WHO. When Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization, Public Citizen issued a report outlining the importance of continued U.S. support for and participation in WHO, not just for the world's sake, but specifically for the safety of Americans as well.

In addition to litigation, research, lobbying and media, Public Citizen has also been leading the charge on organizing and mobilizing with partners across the country, holding meetings and press calls, and participating in protests – including the nationwide "Hands Off!" rallies in early April, co-organized with Indivisible, MoveOn, Working Families Party, and others, that drew over 100,000 people in Washington, D.C., and millions more at some 1,300 events all across the country. We also helped organize the May Day days of action.

Demonstrations like these will inspire more and more Americans to join the movement against Trump. And that – as experience around the world and throughout history has taught us – is how you beat authoritarianism. Public Citizen is continuing to help organize and publicize rallies planned for the weeks and months ahead.

Although the first 100 days of Trump have been terrifying in their intensity and authoritarianism, the work that we have been doing at Public Citizen to push back gives us hope. Our fight back strategy can – and is already starting to – produce real results, and we will continue to use every tool we have to fight the good fight until we win. ■

Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman fired up a crowd with a powerful speech at the "Hands Off" rally in Washington, D.C. in April. Photo courtesy of Emily Leach.

▶ **Foreign**, from page 1

assistance. AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC), a nonprofit working to help end the HIV epidemic, was forced to shut down a network of African civil society groups supporting HIV prevention research. Life-saving studies were abruptly halted. Staff were fired. Communities lost access to treatment and trusted support. The Journalism Development Network (JDN), which backs investigative reporters in some of the world's most dangerous media environments, was forced to lay off 20% of its staff and may have to shut down programs across Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), which provides mental health and psychosocial services to torture victims across the world, was forced to shutter its clinics.

Public Citizen filed suit on Feb. 10. Within days, a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order, ruling that the suspension of all foreign aid was likely unlawful and enjoining the administration from giving effect to suspensions or terminations of foreign assistance awards. When the administration defied the order, Public Citizen filed additional motions in court. The legal battle escalated quickly, first to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, then to the U.S. Supreme Court. Although we prevailed at the Supreme Court, the administration continued to delay, appeal, and obstruct at every step.

"Trump bypassed Congress and pulled the plug on life-saving programs with the stroke of a pen. We're in court because the Constitution does not give the president that kind of unchecked power."

— Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program

On March 11, the court issued a preliminary injunction, rejecting the administration's claim that it could override Congress's funding decisions. But the court declined to order reinstatement of the many grants that had already been terminated. Thousands of foreign assistance programs stayed closed.

The consequences have been savage, whether measured in lives lost or public health systems shattered. Measles is tearing through countries that had once brought it under control. Polio campaigns have been suspended across multiple regions. Clinics that once delivered babies, offered prenatal care, and kept women alive are shuttered. Meanwhile, the Trump administration withdrew CDC staff from key overseas posts, including scientists supporting the Global Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network, the world's early warning system. That retreat crippled measles detection and response worldwide, delaying outbreak alerts and weakening the global net that once helped protect the U.S. as well. UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, warn that millions of children are now missing basic vaccinations and now lack the protection that decades of U.S. investment once made possible. This is nothing short of deliberate, devastating, and unlawful destruction.

As Dr. Atul Gawande, former Assistant Administrator for Global Health at USAID, put it: "This is a massive loss of life already underway. There have been three months of total suspension of malaria programs going into malaria season. TB is surging. Measles deaths are climbing. And the most alarming thing is the gleeful indifference—the joy in smashing the system down."

Meanwhile, Congress has failed to act. While more than 200 lawmakers have filed briefs and spoken out against the termination of foreign assistance, the House majority and Senate leadership have done almost nothing tangible to enforce the law or to repair the wreckage.

Foreign aid makes up less than one percent of the federal budget. By contrast, Congress appropriates nearly a trillion dollars a year to the Pentagon. This isn't a budgeting error; it's a values statement. And with every day of inaction, more programs vanish, more people die, and U.S. credibility in the world unravels.

"This isn't just about foreign aid; it's about who gets to decide whether millions live or die," said Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program. "Trump bypassed Congress and pulled the plug on life-saving programs with the stroke of a pen. We're in court because the Constitution does not give the president that kind of unchecked power."

This fight is far from over. Public Citizen continues to litigate AVAC v. State Department, seeking to reverse the termination of funding and hold the U.S. government to its legal obligations. But the deeper question remains: will the United States defend the rule of law — or normalize a system where presidents can act with no accountability, no regard for the law, and no regard for human life? Right now, people are suffering around the world because of decisions made in Washington in disregard of the law. The suffering can be alleviated, but Congress must act. ■

▶ **Crime Spree**, from page 1

sought to defend transgender and gender non-conforming workers from workplace abuse and discrimination.

The corporations facing the greatest number of investigations and cases are Tesla (nine), Amazon (seven), Pfizer (five), UnitedHealthcare (five), and Wells Fargo (five).

One crypto corporation, BitMEX, which pleaded guilty to a criminal banking law violation alongside its executives last year, received from Trump what appears to be the first full presidential pardon for a corporation in U.S. history. Now it will never pay the $100 million fine imposed for its criminal misconduct.

Trump Ties

At least 71 corporations facing enforcement actions collectively contributed $57 million to Trump's inaugural festivities. These corporations are facing a total of 102 separate federal investigations and lawsuits. Twenty-one of these corporate inauguration donors already had their cases dropped or halted.

Among the corporations that have been rewarded with dropped or halted enforcement are several Trump donors and allies, including the for-profit prison corporations CoreCivic and GEO Group, Zelle network banks JPMorgan, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo, crypto corporations Coinbase, Gemini, Kraken, OpenSea, Ripple, and Robinhood, and Elon Musk's SpaceX.

"The administration's effective no-enforcement policy against corporations virtually guarantees more financial scams, more workplace discrimination, more poisoning of the air and water, more food contamination, more fraud, more disease and more preventable death," said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen.

Billionaire Beneficiaries

It's not a coincidence that the billionaires and CEOs who lined up behind Trump alongside cabinet members during the inauguration represent corporate lawbreakers facing numerous federal enforcement actions that the Trump administration inherited from the Biden administration. Among them were:

Jeff Bezos, the billionaire founder of Amazon, which faces a DOJ investigation for an alleged fraudulent scheme to conceal warehouse worker injuries from OSHA, an EEOC investigation into alleged discrimination against pregnant warehouse workers, an FCC investigation into alleged illegal sales of wireless frequency jammers, CPSC litigation over the sales of unsafe recalled products, two FTC lawsuits — one over deceiving consumers into enrolling in Prime and one for acting as an illegal e-commerce monopoly — and over 300 open NLRB cases alleging unfair labor practices and covering up to 1.6 million employees.

Mark Zuckerberg, the billionaire founder and CEO behind Meta, which faces a CFPB investigation into allegations it improperly obtained and used consumer financial data to fuel its advertising business, an FTC lawsuit alleging illegal monopolistic behavior in the social media market, and two open NLRB cases alleging unfair labor practices covering up to 65,000 employees.

Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Alphabet, the parent company of Google. The DOJ's search monopoly case against Google is in penalty phase — with antitrust prosecutors recommending a breakup of the search giant — and the trial for the DOJ's advertising monopoly case against Google recently concluded. Google also faces 20 open NLRB cases alleging unfair labor practices and covering up to 180,000 employees.

Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, which faces a DOJ antitrust lawsuit alleging monopoly violations in the smartphone market and over 20 open NLRB cases alleging unfair labor practices and covering up to 160,000 employees.

Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, which faces an FTC investigation into possible consumer harms from its data collection practices

see **Crime Spree**, page 5 ▶

▶ **Crime Spree**, from page 4

and AI-generated misinformation and an SEC investigation into investors possibly being misled.

And Elon Musk, the CEO of Neuralink, SpaceX, Tesla, X (formerly Twitter), and xAI, which started the Trump administration collectively facing 17 federal investigations.

Neuralink faces a USDA investigation into alleged misconduct related to the treatment of test monkeys and an SEC investigation alleging unspecified misconduct.

SpaceX has been in the process of negotiating a resolution with the EPA over repeated pollution discharges in Texas, an FAA lawsuit alleging multiple safety violations involving rocket launches in Florida, and an NLRB complaint alleging the company illegally fired workers who criticized Musk. The Trump administration dismissed a DOJ civil rights lawsuit against SpaceX alleging discrimination against asylees and refugees in hiring.

Tesla faces a criminal fraud investigation by the DOJ over exaggerated claims about the "full self-driving" capability of vehicles' "Autopilot" mode, a related SEC investigation into whether exaggerated claims about "full self-driving" vehicles misled investors, a joint investigation by the DOJ and SEC into Tesla's plans to construct a private residence for Musk, an EEOC investigation into alleged racial discrimination and workplace retaliation at a Tesla factory in California, four NHTSA investigations into vehicle problems, and seven open NLRB cases alleging unfair labor practices and covering up to 140,474 employees. An OSHA investigation into a worker's death at a Tesla factory in Texas was closed in January, though no announcement as to whether a citation was issued has been disclosed.

X (formerly Twitter) faces an SEC lawsuit against Musk alleging misconduct related to the CEO's $44 billion takeover of the company and an NLRB case alleging unfair labor practices. And xAI faces an EPA investigation into air pollution concerns related to its "Colossus" supercomputer in Memphis, Tennessee.

Public Citizen's full searchable database of over 500 investigations and cases against over 430 corporations with links to underlying sources is available on Public Citizen's Corporate Enforcement Tracker at citizen.org/article/corporate-enforcement-trump-tracker/. ■

How a Dubious $3 Million Gene Therapy for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Got FDA's Green Light

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS

"It is especially challenging to find better treatments for Duchenne muscular dystrophy and other rare but devastating conditions."

— Dr. Robert Steinbrook, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) is a rare and deadly congenital, genetic disease that weakens the muscles over time. Because the gene is caused by a mutation on the X chromosome, the disease mostly affects boys. Children with DMD usually appear healthy until around age 3, but then their muscles begin to waste away. Most lose the ability to walk during their teenage years and die young.

Despite decades of efforts to build awareness of the disease and fund research into it — including a long-televised (from 1966-2010) national fundraising campaign by comedian Jerry Lewis — there's still no cure.

In the absence of a cure, researchers developed a new type of gene therapy to treat DMD and provide patients relief. This treatment, delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl (brand name: Elevidys), aims to deliver a miniature version of the missing muscle-protecting protein (called micro-dystrophin) to the patient's muscle cells. The goal is to mimic the role of the full-sized dystrophin protein that people with DMD lack. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted it accelerated approval in 2023 and full approval in 2024. This complex therapy is priced at more than $3 million per patient. Public Citizen's Health Research Group opposed both FDA approvals of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl because clinical trials failed to demonstrate the gene therapy's effectiveness to slow DMD's progression. These approvals went forward despite persistent objections from FDA scientific reviewers who shared our concern that this gene therapy was not ready for approval.

In February, Public Citizen released a report, "Failed Trials, Yet Full FDA Approval of a Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Gene Therapy," in collaboration with Dr. Reshma Ramachandran of the Yale School of Medicine. The report uses the delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl story as a case study and makes recommendations for how the FDA might avoid ill-advised regulatory decisions in the future.

"It is especially challenging to find better treatments for Duchenne muscular dystrophy and other rare but devastating conditions," said Dr. Robert Steinbrook, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group."Unfortunately, there is no convincing evidence that this very expensive gene therapy will help patients regain muscle function."

The approval of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl was predominantly based on the results of two phase 3 randomized clinical trials. The first trial, reviewed by the FDA in May 2023, involved 41 children with DMD aged four to seven, who were followed for 48 months after starting treatment. The primary outcome was the patient's score on a 17-item standardized scale (with a maximum range of 34 points, higher scores indicating better muscle function, 0 to 2 possible points per item) that assesses gross motor performance. That trial found no significant difference in the primary outcome between the delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl and placebo groups. The sponsor, Sarepta Therapeutics, Inc., then sought accelerated approval based on a surrogate endpoint of micro-dystrophin protein expression in the muscle tissue of patients who received the gene therapy at week 12. Although this protein was found in participants receiving delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl, the presence of the protein did not correlate with muscle function. FDA scientists assigned to review the trial concluded that the clinical benefit from delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl was not supported. Nonetheless, Dr. Peter Marks, then the director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER), overruled these scientists and granted accelerated approval for patients between the ages of 4-5 years old with a DMD mutation who were still able to walk. This decision was based largely on data from just eight of the 41 trial participants.

In October 2023, Sarepta completed a second randomized clinical trial of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl, similar in design and outcomes to the first, but this time involving more participants (125 patients). Again, the results for the primary outcome were not significant, showing only a 0.65-point difference between the treatment and placebo groups on the 34-point motor function scale. Sarepta, however, pointed to secondary results that showed, for example, that on a 10-meter walk/run test children treated with delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl improved their time from about 4.9 seconds to 4.4 seconds. Again, FDA scientific reviewers found the data insufficient to demonstrate the clinical effectiveness of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl. And again, the CBER director doubled-down on the earlier accelerated approval of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl. At his direction, the FDA granted the gene therapy full approval, and expanded the approval to include all persons over four years old with a DMD mutation regardless of their ability to walk.

Although some families may see hope in the decision, the FDA's approval of delandistrogene moxeparvovec-rokl underscores the need for both stronger approval standards and prompt reforms in the agency's internal procedures. Public Citizen's report calls for revisions in the FDA's internal procedures to "make it far more difficult for individual officials in leadership positions to overrule the consensus evaluations of agency scientists assigned to a regulatory decision." ■

Largest Medicare Advantage Firms Spend Big to Privatize Care, Deliver an Inferior Product

BY MIKE TANGLIS

In 2024, more than half of all seniors eligible for Medicare were enrolled in private plans largely paid for with Medicare funds. These private plans – known as Medicare Advantage plans – cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars and deliver inferior care compared to traditional Medicare, according to an analysis by Public Citizen.

Companies offering privatized Medicare Advantage plans make it difficult for patients to get the care they need and for doctors to provide necessary care. With profit incentives to deny care, Medicare Advantage plans regularly refuse to authorize or reimburse care that patients need. A study by the Department of Health and Human Services inspector general found that 13% of the Medicare Advantage denials for prior authorization were for services that met Medicare coverage rules, "likely preventing or delaying medically necessary care for Medicare Advantage beneficiaries."

Insurance companies offering Medicare Advantage gain revenue by offloading high-risk patients with expensive health conditions to traditional Medicare. The result is to leave traditional Medicare with a pool of less healthy people, raising its per-patient cost. Seniors in the final year of life – when health care needs and costs are disproportionately high – shift from Medicare Advantage and to traditional Medicare at more than twice the rate of other Medicare Advantage beneficiaries.

Medicare Advantage insurers drive overcharges by "upcoding," meaning they add medical codes to patient charts to make them appear to be sicker than they are. With more diagnoses, they appear to be riskier patients, and Medicare pays the insurers more.

Just last year, private insurers offering Medicare Advantage plans cost Medicare an excess of $83 billion. From 2007 to 2023, privatized Medicare overpayments totaled more than $600 billion. Over the next decade, these excess payments are on track to exceed $1 trillion.

Just seven companies account for 84% of all Medicare Advantage enrollment. While lobbying disclosures do not reveal how much is spent on a single issue, disclosures reveal that these seven companies spent more than $330 million combined lobbying on all issues over the last five years, according to a report released by Public Citizen in March. Blue Cross Blue Shield has spent the most on lobbying over that time, more than $131 million. Blue Cross is followed by CVS ($53 million), Cigna ($44 million) and UnitedHealth ($34 million).

Together, these seven companies deploy hundreds of lobbyists each year to Capitol Hill to influence policy. In 2024 for example, they sent a combined 328 lobbyists to lobby the federal government on all issues. Of these, 223 lobbyists – nearly 70% of the total – reported specifically lobbying on "Medicare Advantage," among other things.

While these companies offer all types of plans, Medicare Advantage plans appear to be a main focus for their lobbyists. At least half of all the lobbyists hired by each company in 2024 lobbied in part on Medicare Advantage.

All of the lobbyists hired by Humana in 2024 lobbied on Medicare Advantage (among other issues). More than 70% of Blue Cross lobbyists were tasked in part with influencing Medicare Advantage policy. Blue Cross Blue Shield – which includes many subsidiaries – deployed nearly 100 lobbyists that lobbied on Medicare Advantage in 2024. Humana sent the second most, 33, followed by UnitedHealth with 27.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, President Trump's Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator, has endorsed the expansion of Medicare Advantage and has been one of the program's most vocal supporters. When he ran for Senate in 2022, Oz disclosed hundreds of thousands of dollars in combined investments in two of the insurers highlighted in this analysis – UnitedHealth Group and CVS Health – investments he says he will sell. Dr. Oz threatens to take us backward and make health care even more difficult for Americans to access and afford. Public Citizen released a report last year, "The Not So Great Oz," highlighting the many reasons why Oz was unfit to lead CMS.

Instead of further privatizing Medicare, we should end the program and move towards a health care system that improves Medicare and expands it to everyone in the country, Medicare for All. Medicare for All would finally allow everyone in the United States to have guaranteed access to care throughout their lives. Families would finally be able to get the care they need when they need it. All medically necessary care would be covered, meaning Americans would no longer have to worry about not being able to afford the care they need. And by removing profit-seeking middlemen from the health care system, Medicare for All would finally bring down the cost of the U.S. health care system.

We will only be able to pass Medicare for All by continuing to build grassroots support and taking on entrenched health care interests. The people's power on this issue continues to grow as Americans feel the pain of a health care system that is focused more on profit than it is on providing health care. While those who profit from the current system will put everything they have behind hindering reform, it is impossible to overcome the moral imperative that everyone in the U.S. deserves access to health care. The American people are only becoming more vocal in pushing for significant change in health care. So, the question is not whether we will achieve Medicare for All, but when. ■

After the Storm: Texas Lawmakers' Grid Gamble Falters

BY JOSÉ MEDINA

After Winter Storm Uri killed hundreds and caused an estimated $195 billion in damage in February 2021, it was clear Texas lawmakers needed to act quickly to bring stability to the state's electric grid and assure millions of Texans that it could withstand deadly storms and growing energy demand. In the months that followed, the Republican-controlled state Legislature and the state's governor took an initial step, passing legislation requiring weatherization of the gas supply infrastructure that froze during Uri, the costliest disaster in state history. Still, the laws did not go far enough and did not ensure compliance.

Two years after Uri, rather than pursuing alternatives to the gas-burning power plants that led to the grid's collapse, lawmakers instead proposed a state constitutional amendment to create the Texas Energy Fund (TEF), which would award low-interest loans and grants to corporations or utilities building new gas-burning power plants – a strategy that Public Citizen's Texas office strongly warned against. Now, Public Citizen is working at the Capitol and with directly impacted communities to counter a flawed plan that is already starting to crumble.

"The main reason the grid buckled during Uri was the failure of methane-burning power plants to function reliably in freezing conditions," said Kamil Cook, a climate and clean energy associate for Public Citizen based in Texas. "Lawmakers' response was to place a $5 billion bet on gas power plants. Gas failed us, and in the years since, solar wind and batteries have saved the grid from multiple potential outages."

When the fund opened for business, it initially appeared that things were going according to plan. The governor and lieutenant governor celebrated the number of applicants. When 17 of those applicants were approved for TEF funding, they received similar praise from state leaders. Since then, however, there has been little to indicate that the TEF can live up to its promise of grid stability.

One approved company was dropped almost immediately when state regulators learned its CEO had pleaded guilty years earlier to federal charges as part of an embezzlement investigation. The company had also used the name of another company as a co-applicant without that company's authorization. Two more of the approved applicants were later pulled when they failed the state's due diligence requirements.

Public Citizen has tracked the

see **Texas**, page 12 ▶

Fighting for Fair Trade: Exposing Cronyism and Demanding Accountability

BY ALANA MATTHEW

Tariffs are on everything. Wait, now some are off. Wait, no, now he's doubling the tariff rate on China. Except now iPhones may get a break. We're in a trade war with penguins. Huh? President Trump claims his tariffs are about protecting American workers, but like so much in his presidency, the reality is the opposite. Both he and his billionaire friends are running the long con, claiming his chaotic tariff policies will protect American jobs when they're selling our country for parts.

Tariffs can be a useful tool, but they must be used strategically for a clear purpose following careful analysis and open debate. Trump's tariffs, however, are based on misleading data and flawed logic.

Rather than crafting policy to strengthen domestic industry or support workers, Trump is treating tariffs like reality TV stunts-dramatic, unpredictable, and designed to boost his image. His fixation on "reciprocity" isn't rooted in sound economics, but in a warped sense of grievance and revenge. The result is a chaotic trade agenda that leaves businesses guessing and workers losing ground.

Following the classic authoritarian playbook, Trump is preying on real frustrations about our global trade system and offering a scapegoat – other countries – while shielding corporate giants with lucrative exemptions while leaving small businesses to fend for themselves.

In his first term, Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese imports, claiming that the move would protect American jobs and businesses. But behind the scenes, a secretive and chaotic exemption process allowed the well-connected to bypass the tariffs while small businesses suffered.

What happened in his first term was bad, but what's to come has the potential to be even worse. The latest report from Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, titled "Trump Loves Tariffs, Just Not for the Rich and Well-Connected," exposes how deep the cronyism ran in Trump's first term and why we must fight back against this rigged system.

In theory, the tariff exemption process was supposed to shield small businesses from undue hardship. But in practice, it became a pay-to-play system that let CEOs with political ties and deep pockets dodge the tariffs that the administration claimed were necessary.

Government watchdogs found that the process was "neither transparent nor objective" and that it quickly overwhelmed government agencies and enabled a quid pro quo spoils system. A January 2025 study confirmed that Trump wielded tariff exemptions like political favors: CEOs who donated to Republicans had a 1-in-5 chance of winning an exemption, while those who supported Democrats had just a 1-in-10 chance. And these exemptions were lucrative: the median firm that won approval was rewarded with a roughly $51,000,000 increase in stock market value beyond the boon to conducting business.

A revolving door of lobbyists swiftly flooded Washington, with records showing that 2018 and 2019 saw unprecedented spending on trade-related lobbying. Former Trump officials moved seamlessly between the administration and lobbying firms, securing lucrative deals for their CEO clients through political pressure, informal meetings, and campaign contributions.

Some of the most shocking outcomes of this rigged system, as uncovered in our report, included Apple receiving exemptions for the infamously made-in-China iPhone and aluminum from the United Rusal Company headed by a sanctioned Russian oligarch with ties to Vladimir Putin. Delays in implementing certain tariffs suggest that Trump withheld them just long enough to extract personal benefit, such as a million-dollar fireworks donation for a controversial taxpayer-funded rally and patent approvals from Argentina for his holdings company.

These examples were not isolated incidents – they were part of a larger pattern where political loyalty and personal enrichment dictated trade policy. Meanwhile, small businesses without access to Washington insiders were left to struggle under the weight of tariffs.

Thanks to mounting public pressure and investigative work exposing these abuses, members of Congress are increasingly stepping up to demand accountability.

"Giving exceptions to Donald Trump's 'rich-as-hell' friends and American adversaries undermines our trade policy and hurts American businesses and workers. Tariffs can be a valuable tool to create new jobs and support manufacturing in the United States, but we need to make sure they're not a corrupt giveaway to the wealthy and well-connected," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) recently. "I am grateful for Public Citizen's work to uncover the depth of this corruption and will continue to conduct strong oversight to protect the integrity of our trade policy."

Now, Trump has returned to the White House with the same playbook and intent to double down on these corrupt and cronyistic practices, dismantling agencies and empowering a loyal inner circle to call the shots.

Trade policy affects us all, from the prices of everyday goods to the stability of American jobs. When exemptions are granted based on personal and political favors rather than economic need, working people and consumers pay the price.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Trade justice isn't slapping on sloppy tariffs; trade justice demands an overhaul: enforcing labor rights, protecting the climate, building resilient supply chains, and anchoring it all in democracy. Trump has done none of this.

With eyes and ears on Trump's tariffs, we have the unique opportunity to not only ward off authoritarianism in real time but also to make a strong case for a trade system that prioritizes fairness for people and our planet over favoritism for billionaires.

With continued pressure from engaged citizens and devoted members of Congress, we can and will fight back against corporate greed and political corruption in our trade policies. ■

Graphic courtesy of Iza Camarillo.

Trump 100 days Roundtable

100 days into Donald Trump's return to power, Public Citizen convened a virtual roundtable of its experts to take stock of the damage — and the resistance. The second Trump administration, turbocharged by loyalists and shielded from oversight, has already proven to be more aggressive, more chaotic, and more legally precarious than the first. At Public Citizen, the response has been swift: 13 lawsuits filed to block unlawful executive actions; several notable investigations into corruption, cronyism, and deregulation; and nationwide mobilizations to defend the rights, health, and safety of everyday people. The transcript below has been edited for clarity.

President Trump has issued a flurry of executive orders since returning to office, some of which resurrect policies from his first term, while others go further in dismantling regulatory frameworks. How does the current pace and scope of executive action compare to his first 100 days in 2017?

Elizabeth Beavers, director of Congress Watch:
I was at Indivisible during the first Trump term, so still closely tracking and in resistance mode. This is truly vibes-based, but it feels like the first Trump administration had similar conditions (they also came in with a Republican trifecta in Congress), but it felt more ham-handed last time and more chaotic in terms of the sort of throwing-spaghetti-at-the-wall model of governance that they came in with. They came in with a couple of key ideas, like the Muslim ban was something that they were really intent on doing in their first week, and they absolutely botched how they did that and they revived it multiple times before it passed through courts. The nature of those he appointed to be in his administration the first time felt a lot more disjointed, sort of ideologically generally, and with their commitment to like Trumpism specifically. And so it really just felt very messy the first time around.

It feels like they came in so much more prepared this time. I mean, they literally gave us Project 2025. They gave us the blueprint and told us what they wanted to do, right? I think he was even more so committed to selecting an administration that are committed to the project of Trumpism — and our "yes" people and our MAGA through-and-through, and appointing the architects of Project 2025 to serve in leadership, and, you know, coming out of the gate on the very first day with dozens of executive orders. On the first day they were ready and just going through their priorities one by one. After that, it feels a lot more shock and awe this time, and a lot more focused, and a lot more just ... they just were more ready this time.

On the other hand, I think we were more ready this time. We have now already been through a Trump administration. We did have some signals about what was to come. Nonetheless, it doesn't mean they weren't able to accomplish a tremendous amount of damage in their first go-around, or that they are not doing so this time, or that we are also not overwhelmed by what they are throwing at us this time, but it just feels more like calculated and executed in a way that is the well-run machine. Well-oiled machine is not the right metaphor, but like a machine of chaos and harm–it's pretty well oiled this time around.

Jonah Minkoff-Zern, co-director of Public Citizen's democracy campaign:
Trump's executive orders indicate that he's not interested in respecting the branches of government, and that his agenda is that it's his government and only his government, and he can do what he wants. The executive orders indicate that attitude and intent, which is part of Project 2025. Getting rid of civil servants and putting in people who are loyal to the president and the machine has been part of their agenda. I think, across the board, their intent at autocratic rule and wiping out opposition and undermining people who oppose them through their actions is really clear. I think what Elizabeth said, you know, we're aware of that, and organizing to defeat that and to maintain or build a stronger U.S. democracy.

Melinda St. Louis, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch:
I agree. I expected it to be very bad, and it has been worse than I thought it would be. There's been an efficiency in the way that they have gone about destroying things that feels different to me than the first time. It was bad the first time, but I think now they know what they're doing more, they have more of a plan. Having Elon Musk in the role that he's in — that's different than the executive orders, but that is definitely different this time around.

Having executive orders and actions in that space [of trade policy] is very much part of appealing to this nationalist, economic populist focus that Trump used to win the election. But it's a complete con. It's completely not what he's doing. He is shrewdly talking to the unions when he is pushing the trade messaging and the tariffs ... I can talk more about that later. But it is definitely more extreme than it was the first time before.

Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's access to medicines program:
Well, it's much easier to destroy something than it is to build it. Trump and Musk are telling themselves and the American people that they've accomplished something by sending their IT team in to destroy federal agencies and AIDS relief and hunger relief around the world, but all they're doing is just creating a disaster that the American people and government and people around the world are going to spend decades now trying to clean up, eliminating the provision of nutritional paste to starving people in Sudan, eliminating HIV prevention services around the globe. Those programs took real time and energy and expertise to put together, but it's a simple trick to take them down. They've been ruthless at destruction, but that's not remotely the same thing as being competent to build something for the American people that pays any dividends over time.

Karla Gilbride, deputy director of Public Citizen's Litigation Group:
I think the authoritarian tendencies were there before, but, as other people have said, now there's more of a game plan. In terms of going after political enemies, the targeting of the law firms and targeting of speech critical of the administration is something that jumps out at me as very, very concerning for the future. The direct assault on judges as well, and then the calls for impeachment — just basically any check on the administration's power, including when there are court orders coming down that the administration doesn't like, that is being turned into, "Well, we have to punish these judges." Certainly from a constitutional separation of powers perspective, that worries me.

After a brutal flu season and amid rising threats from diseases like polio and measles, the U.S. is backing away from the World Health Organization. What does this mean for public health?

Peter Maybarduk:
The Trump administration is weakening our disease surveillance generally. The United States has invested in networks that track flu around the world, that fight measles, and the United States is pulling our scientists and funding back from those programs. The U.S. does not actually have the tools in place to surveil diseases the same way, without global networks. So we could be in a position where it is more difficult to make vaccines that are appropriate to the flu season, for example. But of course, it's chaos and it's patchwork, and we just don't know. Trump already has made several mistakes by pulling experts back from WHO panels and then having to reinstall them, because pulling out is too dangerous.

Meanwhile, Trump is decimating the

federal research agencies. They're slashing research into infectious diseases, and they're slashing detection, prevention and treatment efforts for many diseases around the world. People already are dying from this, from AIDS, starvation and other cuts to humanitarian relief. Hundreds of thousands of people likely will die in developing countries, perhaps many more. And it's no stretch to imagine that in the near term, we could be paying a pretty significant price in the United States as well. It's gotten unpopular to talk about COVID, but we can have a rational discussion about what are the most appropriate pandemic policies, and still not forget that more than 1 million Americans died. 1.19 million. By some estimates, that is the same as all U.S. military casualties from all U.S. wars combined. It's insane that loss can be so close to our present and yet so far removed from our priorities as a country, to strengthen disease response. Going the opposite direction is reckless. We pay dearly for it.

The first 100 days have been aswirl with chaos about tariffs. Trump has announced that "China isn't doing any business" in the U.S., levied "reciprocal tariffs" on dozens of countries, claiming that they would protect American jobs. Stocks have plunged after the new tariffs went into effect earlier this month. Where do things stand after 100 days?

Melinda St. Louis:
I think the main message is that it has been chaos. They even claim it's "strategic uncertainty" — that's what they're trying to frame it as — but what they've really created is a play to U.S. workers and the working class, who he has conned into believing he is standing up for American workers. That's the frame he's using to talk about tariffs. However, what he has actually done is use tariffs in an extremely reckless way.

We believe tariffs can be used strategically to support domestic manufacturing and punish bad corporate behavior in the race to the bottom. But Trump has taken that idea and perverted it, imposing sweeping, reckless tariffs and doing so with extreme incompetence. It's pretty clear that what he likes about tariffs — and about the threats — is that he wants governments and companies to come beg him for mercy. He wants to individually grant favors and make deals.

We typically don't use the term "trade war," but what he's doing with China fits that description. We're now at 145% tariffs on Chinese goods. China has simply responded by slapping retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods. Trump claims they're coming to negotiate, but they've made it very clear they are not, so he's actually been pretty humiliated.

There are good reasons to use tariffs strategically — Biden's administration also used tariffs in specific sectors when necessary to address real corporate abuses and cheating — but Trump's approach is absolutely not working and is upending the global economy. He has also used tariffs to bully countries like Mexico and Canada as part of an anti-humanitarian agenda, demanding they militarize their borders and inventing false claims, like saying there was a fentanyl crisis coming from Canada, which is virtually nonexistent and wouldn't be addressed through tariffs anyway.

Using tariffs to advance an anti-humanitarian agenda is the opposite of protecting U.S. workers. He also claims tariffs will generate revenue. But if your goal is to generate revenue, you're not actually trying to use tariffs to change behavior and protect U.S. jobs — because tariffs are not a sales tax. They are a tax on imports, paid by the importing companies on the wholesale price.

The real purpose of tariffs should be to shift market behavior toward responsible and local supply chains. But if you're generating lots of tariff revenue, that's a sign you haven't changed sourcing at all — meaning you're not protecting U.S. jobs.

They say they want to protect U.S. jobs with these tariffs, but at the same time, they claim they'll generate revenue — which, again, signals failure — and they're also negotiating dozens of secret trade deals behind closed doors, without congressional oversight or public transparency. These deals are aimed at pushing the agenda of Big Tech, Big Pharma, and other corporate giants, which Public Citizen has been pointing out.

During his Liberation Day announcement, Trump waved around a report, calling it a "special book" that supposedly showed how badly other countries treat the U.S. But that report was really just a corporate wish list from Big Tech, demanding that other countries dismantle regulations that hold them accountable.

We just put out a response to another report, the Special 301 Report, which is basically a Big Pharma hit list of other countries' laws. And those are the non-tariff barriers that he's saying that they're trying to eliminate. And so this is Global Trade Watch's bread and butter. We've been fighting these things for years. We know that while he's claiming he is 'trying to do something different,' or that he is 'upending the global economic system'; what he is really doing is plunging it into chaos while continuing to do giveaways for his corporate billionaire buddies.

There have been multiple conflicts of interest and grift surrounding Trump's second administration. One thinks of his nominees for cabinet positions and other important political appointments; Amazon paying $40 million to license a documentary and a limited series on first lady Melania Trump; a $1 Million-a-Plate Candlelight Dinner with Elon Musk. Elizabeth, could you walk us through some of the unique ethical challenges that have emerged in the first 100 days?

Elizabeth Beavers: I can't promise to cover the most important or top-line issues, because there are just so many. How do we even filter them? I'll give you a couple we've been focusing on intensely. One is around cryptocurrency and the opportunities it has provided for grift, at a level that's almost cartoonish, both in design and execution. One thing we've done a lot of work on is Trump unveiling his own cryptocurrency after taking office. But it's not actually a cryptocurrency — it's a meme coin. He's also asking people not to call it a coin. So, it's just a meme you buy, and you get nothing in return. You can't resell it, and it has no investment value. It's just something you can buy from Trump, just because.

Now, the president is exempt from many ethics laws, but he's not allowed to solicit gifts. We strongly believe what he's doing with this meme coin is skirting the line — or, frankly, crossing it — into unlawful solicitation of gifts. He's got this website that says, "Buy now," and he's pushing it on social media like, "Invest in my meme." The website makes it pretty clear, in not even that small print, that you get nothing from it. There's no coin, no value. What you're doing is showing your support for a patriotic president you love and adore, which is essentially just a cash grab for Trump. He's been pocketing the money from this meme sale, which is a pretty obvious grift, and it's an unethical opportunity.

We've filed ethics complaints about this and are asking the authorities to investigate it. Personally, I'm not holding my breath for the Trump administration's own watchdogs to jump in, but it's pretty shocking.

Another issue I'll highlight is a report we've got coming out soon, where we're tracking the fact that Elon Musk, the world's richest person, has been involved in this amorphous "DOGE" project. It's making decisions about seizing sensitive data from departments and agencies, deciding how money gets spent, what agencies exist, what regulatory protections should exist, and what enforcement actions are taken. Musk has deep personal conflicts of interest in these decisions. We've calculated that at least 70% of the agencies targeted by DOGE have a direct conflict of interest because Musk has business ties to them. Either he's received funding from them, they have regulatory authority over his activities, or they've investigated and enforced regulations against him. Maybe there's proprietary information he could access through DOGE and its data sets.

The best answer we've gotten from the White House is, "Don't worry, Elon's going to regulate himself and recuse himself when he thinks he needs to." That's definitely not good enough. Honestly, as we thought through how to mitigate these conflicts, we concluded that you just can't have a billionaire with these business interests wielding this kind of authority in the federal government. It's an inherent conflict of interest that can't be resolved. These are just a couple of cartoonish examples, but they're emblematic of the broader, flamboyantly corrupt nature of this administration and their blatant disregard for ethical concerns.

Jonah Minkoff-Zern: I think after the 2024 election, there was this sense that people were really downtrodden, people were hopeless, people felt like they couldn't speak up. And I don't think people feel that way anymore. I think people understand in a broad and deep way that this is not working for them and they have power in standing up against it, whether it's the 3.5 million people taking to the street on April 5 or 400 rabbis earlier in April speaking out against how the Trump administration is using antisemitism to build authoritarianism or 200 university presidents signing a letter in opposition to Trump's attack on higher education. There's 1,300 events planned for

see **Roundtable**, page 10 ▶

▶ **Roundtable**, from page 9

May Day. People are feeling more and more empowered that they can act. The polls are also showing an unprecedented decline across the board, including on economics and immigration policies. So people are seeing that there's power. If we want to put out this forest fire that this Trump administration is and start rebuilding, we have to do more than look toward the next election and mobilize en masse for us to have a democracy. We can't wait two or four years. That's not what history has shown us or movements around the world or democratic backsliding. It's only through mass mobilization and grassroots action that we can win. Studies have also shown that we can win if we do those things.

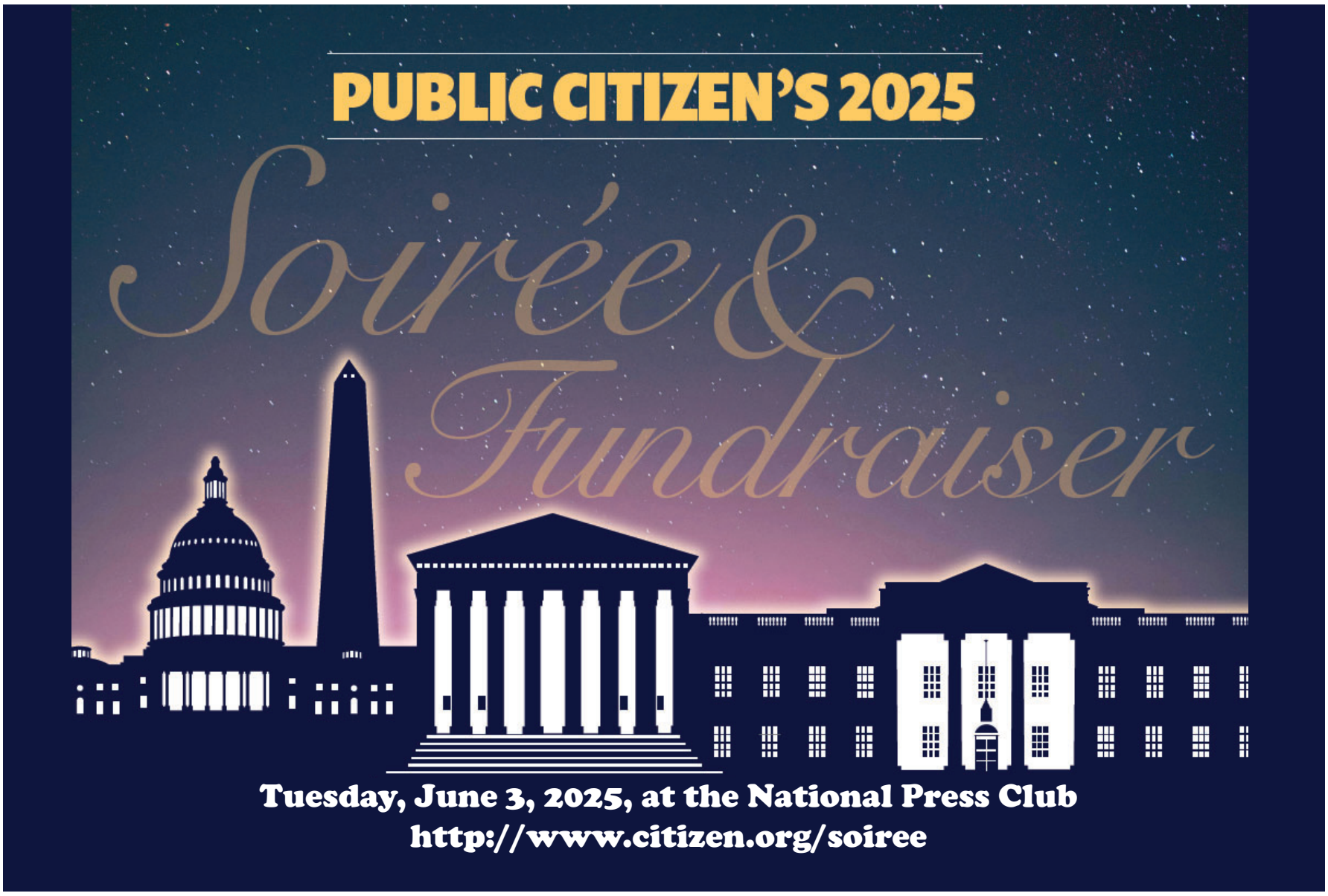
As of the end of April [and as *Public Citizen News* is heading to print], Public Citizen has filed 13 lawsuits against the Trump administration (see page 3). Many of the lawsuits involve agencies being dismantled or critical public data being taken offline. Can you talk about a few cases that best exemplify the stakes of the moment?

Karla Gilbride: I'm happy to give a couple of examples in those categories. We do have cases focused on the dismantling of entire agencies. The first case we filed in this regard involved USAID. We filed a couple of cases around USAID — one focused on the freezing of foreign assistance funds, and another on the dismantling of the agency itself. The case about dismantling the agency is currently pending with a motion for summary judgment. We're hoping for a final decision soon, since it was one of our earliest cases and is the furthest along in the process. We're hoping for a ruling on whether dismantling an entire agency in this way is constitutional and whether it violates the Administrative Procedure Act. There's a reorganization plan that would move some of USAID's functions to the State Department, but that can't happen without an act of Congress, because Congress created the agency. We have an amicus brief in this case from over 200 members of Congress making this point, as well as a brief from the Constitutional Accountability Center, which dives into the history of reorganization acts dating back to the early 1900s.

We also filed a similar case around the decimation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). That case has already been through the D.C. Circuit a couple of times. In March, we got a strong injunction freezing further layoffs and cancellations of contracts with the CFPB. The district court judge told them to stop dismantling the agency. That was appealed, and the D.C. Circuit allowed the order to stand, but with some leeway to fire people they deemed unnecessary. The administration used that leeway to attempt to fire 90% of the remaining staff. We went back to court, asking for those firings to be undone. This past Monday, the D.C. Circuit recognized it had given the administration too much leeway and revised the order to prevent any further firings. So the injunction is still in place, which was a big win.

In other cases, we're challenging the removal of public data. We've filed several lawsuits on this. One involves the "Doctors for America" case, which targets the removal of health data from government websites because it mentioned terms like "gender" or "equity," which have become taboo under the administration's anti-DEI crackdown. That was quickly enjoined, and summary judgment motions are being briefed. We've also filed or will soon file a case involving environmental justice websites being taken down — climate change-related information and sustainability data removed by the administration. That case is being filed on behalf of the Sierra Club and other environmental groups.

These lawsuits are crucial because they challenge the executive branch's attempts to unilaterally pull back money that Congress has already appropriated. We also have cases around funding — one related to international labor contracts and another involving the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, which focuses on foreign assistance funding. These cases reflect the stakes of the moment, as the administration tries to unilaterally cut off vital funding for public health and other critical work. The executive branch can't just undo funding that Congress has already allocated. ■



The Art of the Meme Deal

BY BARTLETT NAYLOR

Achieving "No. 1 Worst" status in any category of Trump's daily and often unprecedented misdeeds, misconduct, blunders, hypocrisies, lies, and self dealings, is no small feat. But when it comes to corruption, his venality in cryptocurrency debatably squats at the crest. Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Ct.) calls this "the biggest corruption story of them all."

Trump once dismissed bitcoin, the most popular crypto, as a "scam" that's "based on thin air" which can facilitate unlawful behavior, including drug trade and other illegal activity. In a stunning reversal, he's now the self-proclaimed crypto president.

Most recently, he promised a presidential dinner to the largest new buyers of his crypto "meme," called (of course) "Trump." Those who send him money receive nothing more than a digital receipt, no different than receipt of a cancelled check – proof of money sent. He doesn't use the more conventional phrase "meme coin" arguably because he's clarified that buyers should not view this as an investment. Rather, those who buy this "meme" celebrate his "leadership." In short, he's asking for money for himself. Federal law strictly regulates payments to government officials, including gifts. Although the president may receive gifts, he may not "solicit" gifts. These prohibitions begin with the Constitution's Emoluments Clause and are reiterated in the anti-bribery statute (18 U.S.C. § 201), and federal regulations (5 C.F.R. § 2635). Although section 2635.205 lists several exemptions from the prohibition, none exempts soliciting purchases for personal gain.

President Trump's promotion of a Trump meme appears to violate this prohibition. In a Jan. 17 tweet, Trump enthused: "My NEW Official Trump Meme is HERE! It's time to celebrate everything we stand for: WINNING! Join my very special Trump Community. GET YOUR $TRUMP NOW. On Truth Social, he posted the same content, on Jan. 21, at 6:19 PM. Now, he's promoting it with the chance to meet with him.

Trump is the principal owner of the Trump Meme. The website explains that the memes are largely (80 %) owned by CIC Digital LLC, "an affiliate of The Trump Organization." "Is this an official Trump product?" the website answers: "Yes, this is the only Official Trump Meme, by President Donald J. Trump."

As to why the public might be interested in sending money, the website explains: "This Trump Meme celebrates a leader who doesn't back down, no matter the odds." Under the Trump meme website's question, "What is a meme?" the website explains: "Merriam-Webster's meme noun: 1: an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture."

The website states that "Trump Memes … are not intended to be, or to be the subject of, an investment opportunity, investment contract, or security of any type." Trump's Securities and Exchange Commission also stated that meme coins have "no use." Other cryptocurrency observers deride memes generally as without value. Former aide Anthony Scaramucci said Trump's effort demeans broader cryptocurrency efforts, calling it "Idi Amin level corruption." Another commenter said that the Trump meme "is effectively a 'for sale' sign on the White House." Some, including an author in the Washington Post, characterized this token as a "sh–coin."

In short, it appears Trump is not soliciting money in exchange for an investment or tangible product (such as a Bible, sports shoes, or a guitar), but soliciting money in exchange for nothing—that is, asking for a gift that will benefit him personally.

Beyond the issue of solicitation, the Constitution (Article 1, Section 9) forbids accepting money (specifically a "present" or "emolument") or anything of value from any "king, prince, or foreign state." Because of the nature of a cryptocurrency exchange, it is difficult to know whether foreign state actors are gifting the president by way of purchasing a Trump meme.

For selling nothing, Trump has profited millions. His initial sale raked in nearly $100 million. The latest salvo in April brought in roughly $100 million more. Some new buyers come through the Binance exchange, legally barred for U.S. investors, meaning that Trump may well be violating the emoluments clause.

At the promised dinner for new high rollers in the Trump meme, guests must still pay for their meal, travel, and other expenses. He may not actually attend this dinner but promises that somebody important will in his absence.

The dangers inherent in the Trump meme should be apparent. If a president is allowed to enrich himself in this way, other politicians might follow this path, rendering the prohibition on solicitation in 18 U.S.C. § 201 and the prohibitions on receipt of gifts by officials other than the president meaningless.

While this Trump meme is worthless (by his own estimation), Trump managed to create an earlier crypto that is worth less. In October 2024, he became the "chief crypto advocate" for World Liberty Financial, a nascent cryptocurrency firm. Importantly, unlike standard cryptocurrencies, they can't be resold. The value in most crypto derives exclusively from what another buyer is willing to pay for it. Economists call this the "greater fool theory." Unlike stock in a traditional company, there is no business, no revenue, no profit. Owning one bitcoin does not yield a quarterly dividend. Presumably, this is why Trump initially dismissed cryptocurrency as "thin air."

But the World Liberty Trump crypto is worse because it cannot be resold. Trump's crypto buys only "governance." "As a (sic) owner, you'll instantly gain a voice in shaping … future [projects]." (Trump retains a majority of the governance tokens, so he can outvote everyone.)

Put more bluntly, these details guarantee a 100 % loss for those who thought they were "investing."Meanwhile, in addition to the SEC's accommodating new policy, Congress is moving legislation to legitimize cryptocurrency initially with twin bills on stablecoins. Fittingly for a president who calls himself a "stable genius," one bill is called the STABLE Act, and the other, the GENIUS Act. Stablecoins are typically tied to the U.S. dollar: one dollar buys one token. Those who sell the tokens could well abscond with the money, or invest it in high-risk ventures that fail, meaning they can't redeem investors who choose to cash out. Stablecoin promoters nevertheless claim this will be the new sliced bread of payments. To date, however, the high fees for redemption frustrates even the remittance business (such as sending money overseas), with the likes of Western Union still cheaper and dominant.

Trump may not face felony prosecution under his administration. But those millions might land him in government housing eventually under a subsequent independent federal prosecutor. And his immunity only applies to presidential acts. Shilling crypto falls outside this immunity. Should Congress grow a spine, accountability could come sooner. ■

Graphic courtesy of Shutterstock.

▶ **SGE**, from page 1

"Special Government Employee" (SGE) to sidestep ethics rules and avoid transparency.

A Public Citizen analysis of court documents, public records, and news stories has revealed that the Trump administration has used the SGE designation to circumvent anti-corruption safeguards and install many more "special" political appointees in high places than just Musk. A report titled "Isn't That Special?," published by Public Citizen, found that the Trump administration has used the SGE designation to place at least a dozen (and possibly more) other individuals in powerful positions across multiple federal agencies. Because SGEs are exempt from some key ethics and disclosure rules, these appointments create serious risks of corruption and demand investigation.

Congress created the SGE category in 1962 to let the government bring in outside experts for short-term work without making them leave their private jobs. According to the Office of Government Ethics, the SGE designation is "a way to apply an important, but limited, set of conflict-of-interest requirements to a group of individuals who provide important, but limited, services to the Government." In the past, most SGEs have served in minor roles on advisory boards or short-term committees.

SGEs are only supposed to work up to 130 days per year in government roles. Any day they get paid or do more than minimal work counts toward that limit. Because their roles are short-term, SGEs don't have to sell off financial interests that might conflict with their government duties, even if their decisions could affect their own companies or investments. Previous presidents have stretched the SGE rules, but the Trump administration has used them in ways that raise far more serious concerns.

"The abuse of the Special Government Employee designation by the Trump administration is like handing out licenses for corruption."

— Public Citizen Co-president Lisa Gilbert

Despite requests from Congress, the Trump administration has not revealed how many SGEs are working in powerful roles or how many are helping to run federal programs while exempt from standard ethics and financial reporting rules.According to a Public Citizen search of court documents, public records, and investigative reports, the Trump administration has now used the SGE designation to place at least a dozen people in addition to Elon Musk in a range of high-level influential roles:

- In three federal agencies: Department of Treasury, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Personnel Management;
- Helping Elon Musk run the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE);
- Advising the White House on matters ranging from foreign affairs to artificial intelligence to health care

The potential conflict of interest and transparency concerns raised by these kinds of SGE appointments to powerful administration jobs are manifold. For example:

- An SGE who owns a company that has or is seeking large federal contracts could use their government role to gain a competitive advantage by learning advance information about how the government will be scoring contract bids.
- An SGE who leads a company that is facing government investigations could use their leverage over officials whose budgets or workforce they are evaluating for cuts to persuade them to scale back or drop the investigations.
- An SGE who is an investor or entrepreneur could shape policy decisions that increase the value of their investments or help to promote their products.

Under existing law, there's no way for the public to know whether these SGEs are working in the public interest or for personal gain, because they often don't have to disclose their finances. Urgent reform is needed to ensure that anti-corruption rules apply to high-level SGEs just as they do to regular federal employees, strengthen conflict-of-interest barriers to prevent financial self-dealing or misuse of insider information, and shine sunlight with financial disclosure so the public knows who has been given the power and privilege of doing the people's business. These reforms must:

- **Prevent Undue Influence**: Prohibit non-advisory committee SGEs who own, direct, or have a major investment in a large for-profit company from communicating with any agency or office that has government contracts with, regulates, or has a pending investigation into or enforcement action against the SGE's company.
- **Let The Public See Who's an SGE**: Direct the Office of Government Ethics to maintain a publicly available database that contains the name of non-advisory committee SGEs, the date they were first appointed, a rolling tally of the number of work days they've been an SGE, and a description of why they are an SGE rather than a regular federal employee.
- **Shine Sunlight on Financial Conflicts**: The default should be that all non-advisory committee SGEs file public financial disclosure reports. Require SGEs who claim an exemption from filing a public report to have their exemption claim reviewed by the relevant agency ethics office to ensure that exemption is properly applied.

"The abuse of the Special Government Employee designation by the Trump administration is like handing out licenses for corruption," said Public Citizen Co-president Lisa Gilbert. "It's yet another example of the administration taking a legitimate process and turning it into a vehicle for connected insiders. ■

▶ **Texas**, from page 6

progress of the approved applications. Seven of the original 17 are out of the program for various reasons, including market factors and supply chain issues which make it unlikely that the necessary gas turbines will start generating electricity before 2029.

Another big hurdle is that communities across the state are worried about a large polluting industrial facility setting up in their backyard. In Granbury, for example, residents who already suffer the health consequences of a large bitcoin mining operation face the prospect of a TEF-funded project being built on the same property. In this case, Public Citizen has been directly involved with community members to help them organize and challenge the plant's pending air emissions permit.

Those efforts paid off in February when Granbury residents successfully obtained a Contested Case Hearing from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, a process for challenging a facility's air emissions permit. Once the contested hearing was granted, the company behind the proposed Granbury plant withdrew from the TEF, citing the resulting "uncertain timing" as the reason. The company has said it will continue to pursue building the plant without TEF funding. Public Citizen remains involved in helping Granbury residents voice their opposition to the facility.

Public Citizen is also countering the methane gas plant plan at the Texas Legislature, pushing lawmakers to change course. Because of the TEF, two years have been lost in the fight to stabilize the grid. During that time, the state's grid operator, ERCOT, has warned that energy demand will likely nearly double by the end of the decade. More dire ERCOT predictions say the grid will be unable to meet demand in the summer of 2026.

"It's not a big surprise that the Legislature's instinct was to choose a grid stability plan relying heavily on fossil fuels. This is Texas, after all," said Adrian Shelley, the Texas director of Public Citizen. "There's recognition inside the Texas Capitol that 'all gas, no brakes' cannot be our only hope. Texas is a leader in large-scale wind and solar, and we've underinvested in programs to reduce electricity demand and keep bills low. The answers are there; we just need to embrace them."

Of the 35% increase in the Texas grid's generating capacity since Winter Storm Uri, 92% of it is due to wind, solar, and batteries – an increase that has kept bills from going higher and saved the grid on brutally hot summer days.

"You don't have to be an expert to know that a big power plant doesn't just get built overnight," Cook said. "But when it's a plant that runs on gas, several other factors make it even more difficult to get it built and generating electricity. That's what Public Citizen and its partners told the Legislature two years ago, and it's what's happening today. The challenge now is convincing leaders that it's time to set another course before it's too late." ■

Public Citizen salutes…

Thank you to these individual supporters who help make our work possible.

GUARDIANS ($100,000+)

Joseph Cotchett
Sheila, Dave and Sherry Gold Foundation
Kriss Hart
Neil Holtzman, M.D.
Susan Ritchie
Stephen Silberstein

AMBASSADORS ($50,000+)

Merle Chambers
Kate Colby
Hope and Anthony Harrington
Ernest Keet
Howard Kirschenbaum
Nolan Family Charitable Foundation
Price Philanthropies Foundation
Maria Sarath Ragucci
David Roberts
Vijay Sanghvi
Mason Smith
Ari Steinberg and Daniela Witten
Marianne Sundell

TRUSTEES ($25,000+)

Sarah Anderson and Kenneth Farnsworth
Jay Causey
Nancy Duke
James Goldstein
Edward Hopkins
Vryce Hough
Dustin Mackie
James and Heidi McClelland
Michael Rooney
Val Schaffner
Deborah Schumann, M.D.
Michael Shoop and Joyce Prudden
Stephen Skrovan and Shelley Powsner
Gerson Smoger
Marsha Soffer
David Thomas

JUSTICE CHAMPIONS ($10,000+)

Krista Abbaticchio
Jason Adkins
Susan Ahlquist
Alpenglow Fund
Anne Ambler
Samuel Amdur III
Bob and Jacquelin Apsler
Carol Baker and Mark Stein
Howard and Lynn Bayer
Medea Benjamin
Alan Berlow and Susan Blaustein
John and Marissa Bingham
Gloria Black
Elizabeth Boardman
Terry and Deborah Borton
Thomas Bosserman
Herve Bronnimann
Mark Bronson
Christopher Brown and Susan Urquhart-Brown
Jeffrey and Deanna Burns
Elizabeth Cabraser
Patricia Calvy
Alan and Janan Carter
Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta
John Cawley
Louise T. Chow and Thomas R. Broker
Nancy Cohen
Ann and John Collier
Margaretta Colt
Gregory Colvin
Mary Cooper
Janet Corpus and John Hoffmeyer
Cow Hollow Foundation / SLC Giving Fund
Thomas Cripps
Harriett Crosby
Starrett and Nancy Dalton
Wesley Davis Jr.
Defense Against Thought Control Foundation
Kerry Deitz
Ann Dusenberry and Brad Fiedel
Steven Fineman
Cary Flitter
Robert Florek
Gloria and Steven Foster
Dr. Michael and Karen Fried Community Education Fund
Richard Friedberg
Kenneth Rebecca Fund
Dream Big Fund
Roger Gallenstein
Pamela Gilbert
James Gleick
Craig Greene
Xan and Bonnie Gregg
Margie Haley
John and Anne Heil
Betsy Hendrix
Thomas Hinkle
Constance Hughes
Robert Jennings Jr. and Barbara Bott
Joseph Jerkins and Christina Cundari
Morton and Merle Kane
Elizabeth Kantor
Ellen Kauffman
Nancy Keane
Randall Kempner
Karen Kordisch
Ursula Korneitchouk
Nobuko Kuhn
Hans Lange
Nancy Leavens
Shelley Levine and Larry Schwartz
Barry Levitt
Fran Ludwig
Bruce and Carla Macleod
Bill Magavern and Sara Nichols
Michael and Louise Malakoff
Mary Maxwell
Tom and Darlene McCalmont
Marie and Douglas McKeige
Cyrus Mehri
Alan and Anne Morrison
Joseph Moss
Marjorie Murphy
National Nurses United
New Venture Fund
David Newbern
Peter Nicholl
Marion and Frank Novak
Victoria Olson
Ellen Oxfeld
Anthony Paronich
Roland Pasternack
Elizabeth and Carl Pieper
Ellen Posel
Fenella Raymond
David Rosenstein
Allen and Linda Saeks
John Santmann
Jamey Shachoy and Laura Ryan
Elizabeth Shattuck
Adrian and Deborah Shelley
Meredith and Thomas Sobol
Robert Spiegelman
Jennifer Stanley
M. Greg Stathakis
David Stern
Robert and Anne Stevens
Jerry and Judith Stone
Ginger Sundin
Tim Toomay
Lana Touchstone
Deniz Tuncer and Derek Cressman
Aber Unger Foundation
Beth Van Schaack and Brent Lang
JP Villedrouin
AD Vircks Trust
Kate Walbert
Jeff and Elizabeth Wallace
Leslie Wharton
Jennine Williamson and John Fitzgerald
Judy Wise
Jasmine Wolf
Elsa Wood
Nick and Yonok Zeller

DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS ($5,000+)

Elizabeth Abbe and Lewis Schneider
Ethel Ackley
Susan Aiken
Harvey and Donna Allen
Amy Allina
Karen Andrews
Brian Arbogast and Valerie Tarico
Anthony Arn
Jeanne Atkinson and David Buchholz
David and Margaret Balamuth
Jenny and Greg Baldwin
Serene Bartoletti
Brooke Beecher
Rhayma Blake
Sara and Joseph Bosco
Karen Bradley
Jack Bradshaw
Robert Bramson
Harold and Stephanie Bronson
Andrew and Madison Brown
Donna Buessing
Betty Butterbaugh
Diane Carter
Carol Cavanaugh
Charles Charrow
Randy Cherner
Chickpea Giving Account
George Chu
G. Cohen
I L Cohen Foundation
Greg and Kelly Collins
Robert Cordova
Beverly Cree
Christine and David Cullenberg
James Cummings
Timothy and Leslie Curtis
Miriam Cutler
Peggy and Gordon Davis
James Davis
Victoria de Toledo
Deitzler Foundation
Gilbert and Barbara Dembo
Jeffrey Dennis
Eli Dickinson
Nancy and Dale Dougherty
Nicholas Dunckel
Robin Dunitz
David DuPont
Karen Durlach
Louis Eby
Daniel and Toby Edelman
Michael Eidsness
Charles Eldridge
Anne Elixhauser
Herbert Ettel and Bern Odyniec
Eubanks Memorial Trust
Sheldon Evans and Martha McMaster
The Bauer Family Fund
Elaine Felde
Scott Fitzmorris
Ivor and Barbara Freeman
Brian Freeman
Valerie Friedman
Kaiser-Weiss Fund
L and L Fund
KW Fund
Gloria Gieser
Allison Goetz Davis, in memory of Abe Goetz
Jackson Goffman
Claude Goldenberg
Sidney Goldstein
David Goodman
Jeoffry Gordon MD, MPH
Jill Gordon
Fred and Jaffa Gutnick
Jon Hagler
Kathryn Haller
Virginia Harris
Robert and Stephanie Harris
Margaret Hazlett
Donald Henley
Monica Heredia
Michael and Kathleen Hoar
Eric Hoffer
Robert Hunter
Nina Janopaul
Arlene Joe and Richard Woo
Howard and Judy Johnson
Giff and Mary Jones
Kim Jones
RM Jose
Peter Joseph
Ruth and Timothy Jost
Joey Kaempfer
Debra Katz, Lisa Banks, Avi Kumin, and Alexis Ronickher
Jonathan Kaufelt and Holly Corn
Drew and Cecelia Kelso
Penelope and Peter Kenez
Jonathan Kerlin
Amy Kiefer
Anne Kim and Marek Mierzwinski
Karyn King
John and Barbara Kohler
Ralph Koldinger
Adam Koranyi
Marjorie Kornhauser and Charles Delbaum
Harry B. Kruger Charitable Fund
Robert and Frances Labaree
Gayle Langford
Robert and Linda Lawrence
Dawn Lawson
Roberta Leonard
Harold Levene
Wayne Lieb
Lisa Lieberman
Theodore Lieverman
Hugh McKenna Lynch Memorial Fund of the Maine Community Foundation
Robert M. Magee
Susan Mann
Meredith Manning
Victor Martino
Samuel Maruca
Christopher and Catherine Mathews
Christine Matthews
Philip McGoohan
Patricia McMillen
Bruce McNamara
Paula Merritt
Paulette Meyer and David Friedman
Eliza Migdal
Nell Minow
Karen Moffat
Wayland and Cynthia Moore
Catherine Moore
Stefanie Moritz and Vincel Jenkins
Mike Murray
Bette Myerson
Christopher Nace
John Nagle
Alisa Nash and David Nash
Diana Nasser
Martinus and Sheila Nickerson
Victoria Nugent and Michael Murray Chorost
Kenneth Nussbacher
Robert Park
Robert Paul
Linder Peterson
Mary Petr
Theodore and Elizabeth Peyton
William Pielemeier
Suzanne Potente and John Huddleston
Sheldon Praiser
Jan Preston
Ralph and Lee Anne Quatrano
Eva and Alan Radding
Margaret Raymond
Michael Reed
Jack and Peggy Roberts
Judy and Don Rogers
Kathleen and David Rohrer
Jay Rosenberg and Jennifer Markell
Laura Rosencrans
Micah and Kirstie Rosenfield
Harry M. Roth and Lisa J. Heller
Michael Royce and Alexis Rappaport
Timothy Ryan
Steven and Beth Schaffer
David Scott
Nick Sheridan
Dan Shih
Don Simons
Ronn Smith
Marvin Soroos
Christine Spagnoli
Eric and Tammy Steele
Jennifer Stevens
Larry and Sheila Stillman
Jewell Stindt
Adam Sweeney
David Switzer
Bradford Taylor
John Thielen and Meg Glattly
Lawrence Title
Georgia Toppe
Rick True
Gene Ulrich
United Steelworkers
Stephen Van Eck
Walter Vom Saal
Barry Walter
Welman Family Fund
Mary Werner
Marsha Williams
Heather Winett
Christine Witzel
Mary and Frederick Worman
James Worth
Sophia Yen
Jody Zaitlin and Mark Nienberg
John Zeltin

SUPER CITIZENS ($2,500+)

Margaret and John Albright
David Aldridge
Michael Armstrong
Russell Atha III
Andrew Atwood
Christopher and Vanessa Aycock
Harry Baker Jr.
Barbara Bannett
Marcus Bass
Gail Bateson and David Rempel, in honor of Tony Mazzocchi
The Victor and Clara C. Battin Foundation
John Bell Jr.
James Bennett
Patricia Berger
Arthur Berndt
Lewis Black
Arthur Bliss
Nancy Block M.D.
Roger Boone
Ida Braun
Alan Brayton
Kevin Brenneke
Mike Brown
Peter Brown
Anne Brownell
Alexander Bryant
Linda Burkett
John Callas
James Cason and Lora Lumpe
Michael Charney
Kenneth Chase
Jan Chatten-Brown
Marg Chauvin
Jarrett Cherner
Jeffrey Chester
Janis Chevalier
Robert Cline
Cohen Milstein Sellers and Toll Pro Bono Committee
Chloe Cornell
Richard Cross
Stephen Crump
Phyllis and Elizabeth Currans
Anna Danner
David Darwin
Diane Davidson
Michael Davies
Susan and Conrad De Jong Fund
Mary Decker
Sarah Delaney
Dorothy Deringer
Nancy Desantis-Vannice
Dan Doernberg and Rachel Unkefer
Raimund Douglas
David Dressler
Jim and Maggie Dunn
Wendy Ecker
Robert Edelman
Anne Ehrlich
Frank Einstein and Nancy Stetten
Adam Elga
Peter Ellis
Alain Enthoven
Diane Faissler
Julie Falconer
Ray C. McKinley Family Foundation
The Elliott Family Fund
Weems Family Fund
Mulligan Family Fund
Susan Farrell
William Fehsenfeld
Marvin and Louise Ann Feldman
Anne and Michael Fenerty
Judith Ferster
Sheila Finch-Tepper
Andrew Fisher
Evelyn Fizell
Alice Foster
Arthur Fox
Barbara Franjevic
Rick Frankfort
Stephen Fredman
Amy Freed
Granada Fund
David Gamble
Orman Gaspar
Leonora Gatewood
Emily Gennari
Cobb Giving Fund
Madelyn and Bruce Glickfeld
Linda Gochfeld
Leslie Gold
Martin Gold
Thomas Goldstein
Roman Gorecki
Mary Gosselink
David Gottsegen
Freya Grand
Alan Greene
Brian Gregg
Mark Gridley
Harriet Gross
Ingrid and George Guerci
Richard Gurtler
David Halperin
Peter Hanauer
Nicholas Harmon
Robert Hart
Adam Hawley
Brian and Marcia Heath
Keith Hebeisen
Bonnie Hechtkopf
Carter and Florence Hedeen
Priscilla Henry
Steve Herman
W. Randolph Herman and Angeline Barretta Herman
Victoria Herring
Peter Heydon
Wendy Hinden and Kathryn Livelli
William Hirsch
Chris Hoffman and Susan Secord
Elizabeth Holtz
Jack Homer
Charles Hornstein
Richard Horvitz
Eugene Howley
John and Mabelle Hueston
The Humanist Fund
Suzanne Hutton
Jane Illades
Kenneth Irwin
Caulton and Gertraud Irwin
Judy Jacobs
Toini Jaffe
Linda and Richard Jenkins
Sandra Jensen and Samuel Broaddus
Marjory Johnson
Michael Johnson
Mary Jones
Robert Jones
Timothy Jost
Joan Judson
Mark Kalmansohn
Robert and Janet Kates
Richard Kayne and CM Pyle
Cynthia Kayser
Anne Kearse
Robin Keehn
John Keevert
Martha Kirby
Ron Klinger
Jeffrey W. Koon
Carl Kostol
Barbara Kyse
Dianne Lane
Michele and David Lane
Donald Lateiner
Lance Lee
Eileen and Paul LeFort
Joan Levin
Arthur Levy
Jennifer Lewis and Marc Bernstein
Peggy Lichter and David DiDomenico
Mark and Joyce Linnett
Henry Lord
Craig Lorimer
Jan W. Low
Gabrielle Lurie
Dorothy Lutz
Linda Lyerly
Allison Lynch
John Manning
Dorothy and Albert Marden
Rebecca and James Mauch
Martha McCluskey
Sally and Thomas McCoy
Dale A. McDonald
Neil McIntosh
Marston Meador
Lee Miller
Elizabeth Miller
Charles and Frances Moore
Celia Mueller
Eileen Murphy
David Myers
Matthew Myers
Dianne Nast
Edward and Audrey Naumes
Jenny Netzer
Deborah Neubaurer
Lee Newman
Donna Marie Oglesby and George Oglesby
Daniel Ollendorf and Carolyn Conte
David Oot
Isabel Pahoyo
Parker and Sharon Palmer
Paul Parise
Roy Pellicano
Jonathan Penner
Anne Peretz
Israel and Rulik Perla
Meagan Pitt Partilla and Michael Pitt
Michael Quirk
Joan Raap
Larry Rail
Mary Rapczynski
Jonathan Rapp, in honor of Pearl Rapp
Rita Rausch
Regina Reilly
Brian Renz
Ida Katherine Rigby, PhD
Thomas A. Rinaldi
Peter Rosenbladt
Phyllis Ross and Michael Minard
David Rossetti and Jan Avent
Craig Russell and Kathy Haranzo
Sarah Salzberg
Louis Sanders
Jay Saunders and Betsey Nevins
Richard Scaletty
Ann Schuh
Steve Seaborg
Christian Searcy
George Seger
Charles and Rosemary Sexton
Judith Shapiro
Ilene Shaw
E. Ann Sheehan
Alan Shue
Marie Sigan
Sam and Susan Simon
Gottlieb Simon
Kenneth Simpson, in memory of Melvin V. Simpson
Margaret Singh
Lee Smith
Alicia Smith
Rick Spanel
Elsie Speck
Ann Stack
Chris Stack
Mary Steele

see **Donors**, page 15 ▶

Are your medicines SAFE?

Many drugs that come to market have risks that outweigh their benefits. Others, found to have risks only after they are approved, are left on the market for dangerously long periods of time. Find out which drugs are safe—and which you should avoid—with Public Citizen's WorstPills.org and *Worst Pills, Best Pills News*.

Search Medications Online

Subscribe to WorstPills.org for only **$10** a year. Visit **www.WorstPills.org**, and enter the promotional code **INTRO**.

Purchase the Printed Newsletter

Subscribe to the monthly **print** edition of *Worst Pills, Best Pills News* for the discounted price of **$12** a year. Visit **www.citizen.org/wpbp** or scan the QR code below. Enter the promotional code **PCMEMBER** to receive your discount.

To subscribe to the print edition by mail for the **$12** price, complete and mail in the form below or visit www.citizen.org/wpbp.

All orders must be prepaid
◯ Check *(payable to Public Citizen)*

Credit card: ◯ Visa ◯ Mastercard ◯ Amex ◯ Discover

CREDIT CARD NUMBER

EXP. DATE

SIGNATURE *(AS IT APPEARS ON CARD)*

NAME

8-DIGIT ID NUMBER *(FROM MAILING LABEL)*

STREET ADDRESS

CITY

STATE/ZIP

EMAIL ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

Send order to: **5P4E5PC**

Public Citizen
P.O. Box 96978
Washington, D.C. 20090-6978

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

On Trump rolling back Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigations on crypto: *The Hill, The Street.* **On the April 5th D.C. "Hands Off" protest:** *The Guardian.* **On the crypto summit:** *TIME, Cointelegraph.* **On Trump's push to control independent agencies and its implications for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC):** *NPR Planet Money.* **On U.S. taxes paying for Trump's golf:** *The Union Journal.* **On the unqualified Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services appointee Dr. Oz:** *Common Dreams, Truthout.* **On National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding cuts:** *Inside Health Policy.* **On tariffs:** *The Independent.* **On DOGE and a mass firing group text:** *San Francisco Chronicle.* **On resisting Trump:** *The Majority Report, The Ralph Nader Radio Hour.* **On saving the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau:** *The Nation.* **On Trump threatening student loan forgiveness:** *Forbes.* **On targeting tax-exempt groups:** *POLITICO.*

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

On the executive order requiring proof of citizenship: *Reuters, The Daily Beast, Union Journal.* **On the government shutdown:** *POLITICO.* **On Trump's unlawful rollback of federal regulations:** *Between the Lines, The Government Executive, Washington Examiner.* **On resisting facism:** *The New Republic.* **On cutting the departments investigating Musk:** *The Los Angeles Times.* **On big payouts for billionaires:** *Common Dreams.* **On DOGE and Musk:** *E&E News.* **On tariffs:** *NBC News.* **On Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sharing data with Homeland Security:** *Forbes.* **On the head of the Internal Revenue Service resigning over collusion with ICE:** *The Independent, International Business Times, Common Dreams.* **On the White House trying to charge people to sue them:** *Huffpost.* **On Trump delaying the appointment of the Office of Congressional Conduct:** *Roll Call.* **On Trump threatening student loan forgiveness:** *Forbes.* **On targeting tax-exempt groups:** *POLITICO.*

Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program

On Trump supercharging the coal industry: *Scripps News, Common Dreams.* **On constructing coal-powered AI data centers:** *POLITICO Tech Newsletter.* **On the AI data centers driving up residents' power bills:** *Stateline.* **On the push for LNG exports causing price surge:** *E&E News by POLITICO.*

Dr. Robert Steinbrook, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group

On canceling vaccine policy: *Axios.* **On scientists' SOS:** *The Guardian, Inside Health Policy.* **On Health and Human Services (HHS) cuts and "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA):** *The Hill.* **On the health impact of the loss of USAID:** *Pioneer Publishers.* **On Food and Drug Administration (FDA) leadership being prior Big Pharma industry executives:** *Law Street.* **On tackling misinformation around Floride:** *Public Health Newswire.*

Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist with Public Citizen's Congress Watch division

On the Line 5 Pipeline conflict of interest: *The Guardian, The Cool Down.* **On Democrats calling for a congressional stock trading ban:** *United Press International.* **On Rep. Chris Pappas misuse of campaign funds in New Hampshire:** *Washington Examiner.* **On Sean Spiller's $35M campaign in New Jersey:** *POLITICO.* **On Ken Paxton's Senate campaign in Texas:** *Washington Examiner.*

Melinda St. Louis, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

On tariffs as a tool for presidential corruption: *Huffpost UK.* **On outrage over tariffs:** *Alter Net.* **On America First policy:** *Inside US Trade.*

Public Citizen Litigation Group

On lawsuits: *The New York Times.* **On Public Citizen v. Trump:** *Bloomberg Law.* **On SCOTUS overruling USAID cuts:** *Scripps News, Business Insider, Bloomberg Law, Wall Street Journal, CNN, Democracy Now!.* **On foreign aid owing pay outs:** *The Washington Post, Axios, Scripps News, Reuters.* **On the destruction of USAID records:** *CBS News Online, Democracy Docket.* **On IRS ICE Data Sharing:** *Tampa Free Press, International Business Times, CNN (Univision), The Guardian, CNN News, CBS News, KQED, Spectrum News, La Opinion, Bloomberg Law.* **On DOE:** *Rolling Stone.* **On CFPB case:** *Bloomberg Law, Law360.* **On environmental groups suing over climate web tool shut-down:** *Inside Climate News.* **On global labor rights (Solidarity Center case):** *Associated Press.*

▶ **Donors**, from page 13

Margaret Steffel
Howard and Leslie Stein
Saul Sternberg
Paul Stettner
Chris Stewart
Natalie Sticesen
Louise and David Stonington
Lucille Straub
Paul Stritmatter
Jeanne Strongin
Catherine Sullivan
Richard Swanson
Frances Sweeney
Kenneth Talan
Michael Taylor
Ann and Don Theis
Joyce Thibodeaux
Amy Thor
Casey Torgerson
Susan Troy and Larry Zipursky
Thomas and Patricia Vernon
Puja Vohra and Laxman Mandayam
Marjorie Volkel
Stephen Waldman
Roger Walsh
Roy Wardell
Elizabeth Warriner
Nancy Carmichael and Michael Washburn
Margaret Watkins
Eleanor Weers
Christine Weir
Stewart Weis
Mariquita West
Susann Wilkinson
Mary Williams
Della Willmann
Michael Wilson
Barry Winkler
Carol and Terry Winograd
Philip Winsor
Philip Wolfson
Sharon Woods
The Woods and Gil Family Foundation
Patricia Wyse
Max Yaffe
Richard Zevin
Jon Zieger
Roland Zimany
Jane Zones

Public Citizen salutes our Citizens for the Future, individuals who have included us in their estate plans:

Maya Abels and Stewart Holmes
Drs. Keith and Muoi Arnold
Andrew Atwood
John S. Barbier
Adrienne Barker
William A. Bein and Ann Bein
Monica Bender
Gary Bennett
Leslie Berkes
Judy and Dennis Berman
Mary Blom
C.M. and Katie Boyer
Peggy Brayfield
Frank and Christine Brice
Robert Brown
Olga S. Buccek
Carol Bullard
Michael Caffrey
John Chevedden
Louise T. Chow and Thomas R. Broker
Tina & Christina Clarke
David and Libby Cockerline
Mark Cohen
Anne Cooke
Wendell and Ginger Covalt
Sarah Dana
Elizabeth Deane
Roy Dempsey and Angelina Cantonjos
Gregory Donges
Minna Doskow
John E. Dost
Denny and Christine Dukes
Warren Edgar
Ola Edwards
Eric Elton
Douglas Estes
Anne Farr
Glenn Fleischman
Gary Galsworth
Mary Geissman
Anne Hammond
Peter and Kathryn Hansen
Wendy Harris
Margaret Hazlett
Carol Snyder Heubeck
Linda Jo C. Hoholik
Alexander Hoppe
Mary Ann and Donald N. Horenstein
Paul and Suzanne Howes
Dr. Edward J. Jay
Barry Johnson
Ruth Kalin
Harold Kalishman Charitable Gift Fund
Steven G. Kellman
Douangmala Khounnavongsa
Howard Kirschenbaum
Erwin and Grace Koch
Linda Kollman
Alex Kouvel
Teresa Gervato Kravitz
Chela Kunasz
Kenneth Levin
Ellen Levine
Barry Levitt
Philip Lewin and Sherrie Barr Trust
Eric Lindblom and Kate Bauer
Maria Maytorena
Claire McManus
Lucy Mead and Richard N. Robertson
Kenneth Meersand
Bernice Mennis
Kent Mitchell
Robert Munson
Diane Nero
Constance O'Hearn
Phyllis Ohlemacher and Bob Wages
Thomas O'Keefe
Patricia Oliansky
David Parees
William Pate
Susan Petra
Bhagwati and Saradel Poddar
Paul Prenovitz
Gertrude Myrrh Reagan
Maurice Rehm
William and Linda Richter
Allen and Linda Saeks
Michael Shoop and Joyce Prudden
Diana and Philip Sickles
Beatrice Sims
B.A. Stribling
William Tallman
M. Taylor
Glen Taysom
Ralph Tuscher
Bill Van Den Berg
Irene Van Natter
Janis Watkins
Alan Weinberg
Richard Weingarden
Paul Werner
Cheryl Wilfong
Raine Wiseman
Kurt and Torj Wray
Preston J. Wright, PhD and Frieda Wright

Thank you to the following individuals who make monthly donations of $100 or more through our sustainer program:

Eva Adler
Tony Aiuto
George Alvarez-Correa
Mary Anderson
Maryetta Andrews-Sachs
John Ates
Teresa Audesirk
Cohn Barbara
Steve Beck
Derek Benham
Arthur Berndt
Anne Bloom
Wendy Born
Betty Butterbaugh
Melanie Canter
Gregory Cermak
Allen Chazin
Catherine Ciullo
David Cloyd
Patricia Cornelison
Joann Noe Cross
Carol Davis
Sarah A. Delaney
Kathleen Dewitt
Kerstin Doell
Marshall Dubaldo
Esther Dunhoff
Randall Eis
Diana and Fred Elghanayan
Michael Elkin
Todd Erickson
Bruce Farber
Susan Farrell
Joel Feldman
Barbara Filippelli
Nancy Finkelstein
Sheilah Fish
Jill Fisher
Veronica Fitzgerald
Lynda Fox
Justine Frischmann
Emily Gennari
Sallie Giordano
Claude Goldenberg
Robert Graves
Richard Gurtler
Christian Haller
Nicholas Harmon
Victoria Harrington
Margaret Herzen
Karen Hodges
Neil Holtzman
William Hunt
Jane Illades
Rebecca Jennings
Margit Johansson
Mandy Katz
Cynthia Kayser
Thomas Kehler
Robin Kennedy
Pamela Kennel
Leslie Kohman
Ruth Kutz
Robert and Pame Larocca
Philip Livingston
Bonnie Mahlmeister
Lucinda Manley
Christopher Manz
Tosi Marceline
Sam Maruca
Victoria Mccaffery
Marston Meador
Donalyn Mikles
Mark Miller
Christopher Nace
Elizabeth Nicholson
Constance M. O'Hearn
Leslie Paoletti
Kelli Pearson
Jonathan Penner
Israel Perla
David Peters
Jerri Linn Phillips
Lena Plamondon
Douglas Plante
Robert Poignant
Gary Pomerantz
Russell Posch
Nancy Rader
Rita Rausch
Wayne Rebhorn
Linda Rehberg
John Rieger
Martha Rowlett
Carol Royce
Donald Rucknagel
Edward Safford
John Santmann
Diana Schroen
Judith Shapiro
Anne Shumway
Arthur Silbergeld
Hezekiah Sistrunk
Alicia Smith
Mary Steele
Tina Stein
Muriel Taylor
Tad Thomas
Kathi Thonet
Joan Tomeo
Jennifer Tomkins
Diane Torrentera
Willem Vandenbroek
Barbara Wayne
Barbara Whitney
Judy Williams
Karl Woodrow
Ann Worthington
Michael Ziegler

Our work would not be possible without the generous support from these Foundations:

AIDS Healthcare Foundation
Arnold Ventures
Bernard and Anne Spitzer Charitable Trust
Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund
Broad Reach Fund
C.S. Fund
Carbon Advocacy Project
Catena Foundation
Climate Imperative
ClimateWorks Foundation
Colombe Peace Foundation
The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation
Deer Creek Foundation
Democracy Fund Voice
Down Ballot Climate Fund
Edna Wardlaw Charitable Trust
Educational Foundation of America
Energy Foundation
Environmental Defense Fund
Fine and Greenwald Foundation
Ford Foundation
Freedom Together Fund
Fund for Constitutional Government
Funder Collaborative on Oil and Gas
Groundwork Action
Houston Endowment
Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation
Janelia Foundation
Johnson Family Foundation
Kohlberg Foundation
Lisa and Douglas Goldman Fund
Local Jobs and Economic Development Fund
Luminate Foundation
Mertz Gilmore Foundation
Methane Partners Coalition
Moxie Fund
New Venture Fund
Omidyar Network
Open Society Foundations
Our American Future Action
The Partnership Project
Park Foundation
PB and K Family Foundation
Perls Foundation
Pisces Foundation
Piper Fund, a Proteus Fund Initiative
Proteus Fund
Reset Tech Action
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Rockefeller Family Fund
Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
The Ruach Foundation
Sequoia Climate Foundation
Stewart Mott Foundation
Sustainable Markets Foundation
The Sunrise Project
Ted and Rita Williams Foundation
Threshold Foundation
Tides Foundation
Urban Movement Innovation Fund
Ventus Charitable Foundation
Wallace Global Fund
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
William H. Donner Foundation
Western Conservation Foundation
The WhyNot Initiative
Zero Carbon Action Fund

To become a leadership supporter, please contact Amanda Fleming at (202) 588-7734 or afleming@citizen.org.

Public Citizen Recommends ...

"Money, Lies, and God: Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy"

By Katherine Stewart; $29.99; Bloomsbury Publishing

Katherine Stewart's "Money, Lies, and God" is an excellent addition to a growing body of work that seeks to explain the alarming political reality America now faces – namely, the rise and success of the Trump movement challenging the core pillars of American democracy.

Trump's MAGA coalition of billionaires and rightwing ideologues drew together earlier spokespersons of discontent, such as the Christian Nationalists whose primary objective is to bring "an end to America's pluralistic democracy" and the working class who have felt displaced by the very success and prosperity of key elements of the liberal order. Eventually, they joined together as an eclectic MAGA coalition – from the wealthy to the shunned working class to the intolerant religious adherents, -pursuing a new political and cultural system not accepting of others.

What happened to cause such a widespread reversal in American norms? Stewart hints at but does not quite posit an answer. I would suggest the answer lies in the choices of pro-democracy Americans to accept, or even embrace, ever-greater levels of economic and social inequalities within an otherwise democratic political system. A sense of equality and inclusion, however imperfect, is at the very heart of any democratic culture. But over the decades, Democratic as well as Republican administrations have let those democratic norms slide. A clearly identifiable privileged class has emerged and now dominates key aspects of American political and cultural life. The common sense of being an American that was prevalent in the 1950s – 1970s has given way to sharp income inequalities that divide the nation, with most Americans no longer making significant gains. This has left many working and middle class Americans alienated politically and economically. Union membership, which is one important indicator of this alienation, has dropped from a high of 20% of the workforce in 1983 to less than 10% today. No longer a key beneficiary of the American Experiment, many in the forgotten classes have now become the marching class for a new order.

Stewart is correct in her assertion that many of the new economic elites spend heavily to help shape each incoming administration to accommodate the interests of the burgeoning economic elite. Even ultra-wealthy Christian donors are spending fortunes to proselytize a religious order short on tolerance and rich on free market enterprise. Bring these segments together and we have got the MAGA home and the threat to American democracy.

In "Money, Lies and God," Stewart seems unwilling to declare outright that the shared responsibility for this threat comes, in part, from the very same people who advocate for democracy and believe in the American experiment.

It is unclear whether the next few years will bring us what history suggests may be American democracy's inevitable conclusion. The values of equality, however ambiguous, run deep in American culture, and legions of Americans are stepping up to the plate to defend democracy. But it is clear, as Stewart points out, that the battle is now at the front door.
– Craig Holman ■

To order books, contact the publisher or visit your local bookstore or library.

Climate Chaos Is Exploding Insurance Costs

BY PATRICK DAVIS

"This data is a first step toward monitoring the crisis, identifying vulnerable communities, and informing urgent policy interventions."

— Carly Fabian, senior insurance policy advocate with Public Citizen's climate program

Across the country, homeowners are coming to terms with the financial costs of climate change through a source they may never have expected: their home insurance. As wildfires, hurricanes, and thunderstorms grow more destructive, insurance companies are passing those costs onto consumers.

A new report from Public Citizen and the Revolving Door Project reveals that this climate-driven insurance crisis is spreading fast – and touches nearly every part of the country. It includes interactive tools that let users look up their state, county, and zip code to see how insurance costs are affecting their community. (The report draws on data recently published by the U.S. Treasury Departments' Federal Insurance Office as well as data published by the Senate Budget Committee.)

As Kenny Stancil, senior researcher at the Revolving Door Project, explains, "Our hope is for this resource to be generative – to prompt further questions, research and analysis, on-the-ground organizing, local op-eds, and investigative journalism."

Until recently, insurers held their data close, keeping the public in the dark about premiums, claims, and cancellations. But after a years-long campaign led by the Public Citizen Climate team, the Treasury's Federal Insurance Office finally released this information. That push included letters from 80 organizations and petitions signed by 40,000 people – a coordinated demand for transparency.

One early petition featured firsthead accounts from Public Citizen's members describing the real world toll: skyrocketing premiums, abrupt non-renewals, and unexpected claim denials. Some members said they had to raid retirement savings to pay for home repairs; others weighed whether to sell their homes and potentially pass the risk to a new family.

Though often dismissed as a coastal problem, the newly released data shows that climate-linked insurance shocks are happening nationwide. Florida and California still dominate headlines, but some of the hardest-hit counties are in the Midwest. In Western North Carolina, long seen as a climate refuge, insurers began pulling out even before Hurricane Helene arrived.

"This data is a first step toward monitoring the crisis, identifying vulnerable communities, and informing urgent policy interventions," said Carly Fabian, senior insurance policy advocate, Public Citizen's Climate Program.

Home insurance itself is essential as it is required in order to get or maintain a mortgage. Renters aren't immune either as rising costs for landlords are often passed down through rent. As premiums soar, families may be forced to sell, relocate, or go without coverage altogether – leaving them dangerously exposed in the event of a disaster.

Unlike mortgages that typically cover 30 years, insurance contracts only cover one year. That mismatch creates a unique financial vulnerability. With the power to renew and reprice annually, insurance companies can collect premiums for decades; then they can simply walk away one year. Homeowners, on the other hand, can't leave their homes and communities so easily.

While everyone will be impacted by a climate-driven insurance crisis, not everyone will be impacted equally. Seniors, especially those on fixed incomes, are particularly vulnerable to sudden cost spikes. Communities of color are disproportionately exposed to wildfires and floods. Low-income households could be priced out of areas, reinforcing an existing crisis for affordable housing.

Opponents of transparency are already striking back. Shortly after the Federal Insurance Office (FIO) published the data, Montana Congressman Troy Downing introduced a bill to abolish the FIO. In March, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners – a pseudo-government entity that coordinates state regulators – asked Congress to abolish the FIO and removed climate change from its list of priorities.

To preserve access to this data, Public Citizen is pressing state regulators to step up. So far, most have sidestepped climate's role in soaring insurance costs – but with insurers now retreating from communities nationwide, that's becoming harder to ignore.

As one Public Citizen member put it in a petition to the FIO, "It's a slap in the face of ordinary urban homeowners that insurance companies are fueling climate change by enabling fossil fuel extraction then jacking up policy premiums to cover their pay-outs to wildfire victims."

While the data provides an essential window into the crisis, it's just the beginning. More data will be necessary. Renters, mobile home owners, condo owners, and affordable housing providers were all left out of the original collection, leaving a gap in the data. As Public Citizen advocates for coverage of additional groups, these communities will be centered in request for additional data. "As the crisis deepens, greater public access to data like this will tell a deeper story about how the crisis is impacting us all," said Carly Fabian. ■

Charitable Gift Annuity

A gift that gives back to you!

A charitable gift annuity is a simple contract between you and Public Citizen Foundation that supports us while providing you (and another individual) with a charitable deduction and payments on a quarterly basis for the rest of your life. The minimum gift to establish this annuity is $10,000 using cash or securities, and the minimum age is 65. A new rule allows you to create a gift annuity with your retirement rollover.

AGE WHEN PAYMENTS BEGIN	SINGLE LIFE ANNUITY RATE	SINGLE LIFE ANNUAL PAYMENT	TWO LIVES ANNUITY RATE	TWO LIVES ANNUAL PAYMENT
65 years	5.7%	$570	5.0%	$500
70	6.3%	$630	5.5%	$550
75	7.0%	$700	6.2%	$620
80	8.1%	$810	6.9%	$690
85	9.1%	$910	8.1%	$810
90 and over	10.1+%	$1,010	9.8+%	$980

For a confidential, free sample illustration, or more information, please contact Genevieve Chase at 202-588-7712 or gchase@citizen.org.